



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07609437 8

But Still a Man



Margaret L. Knapp



F

1

NR
Rm.

BUT STILL A MAN

BUT STILL A MAN

BY
MARGARET L. KNAPP

"A minister — but still a man." — POPE.

✓
BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1909

40

111341B

Copyright, 1909,
BY LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

All rights reserved

Published February, 1909



Electrotyped and Printed at
THE COLONIAL PRESS:
C. H. Simonds & Co., Boston, U.S.A.

F

BUT STILL A MAN

CHAPTER ONE

THE dining-room at Burford Theological Seminary had once been the chapel. It was a long room, too long for its width, and had wires stretched across it under the ceiling to break the echoes. Narrow, Romanesque windows gave it an accidental character of medieval scholasticism. For convenience the colored lozenges in the lower sashes had been replaced by plain glass, and on gloomy days the place seemed filled with grey, intellectual light.

The varnished floor was worn dull in pathways around the tables. Table A., between the windows at the farther end, was reserved for the senior class, and generally had some little decoration upon it. This noon it was a tumbler of hepaticas, which Robbins' sister had sent him. Potts, coming in late to dinner, had beamed on them, and called them harbingers of spring. Potts' remarks invariably sounded like quotations.

There was a dreary wait between the courses, while the housekeeper served pudding in a far-off pantry. By common consent, this was the time for airing one's

opinions, either to the table at large, or confidentially, as it were, to one's nearest neighbor, if he happened to be a fellow you could let yourself out to. Gordon Dale sat next to his chum Griggs, and under cover of the hubbub their talk was in full swing, when there came one of those curious lulls which occur sometimes in conversation; and all who were at the table heard the words:

"A man of to-day is likely to fetch up against one of two problems."

"'Two'? I wish that were all!" answered Tom Griggs, stopping short at the sound of his own voice, which was powerful.

"Who's talking about problems — you, Dale?" called Chandler, from his seat opposite. "What is it now, the two Isaiahs, or something more abstruse?"

"I spoke of practical problems," replied Gordon Dale, in a tone meant to check further inquiry; but Chandler was not sensitive to checks. He had a full face, with large cheeks, a prominent chin, and a quick, rolling eye, and was privately known among his classmates as "Bluff."

"State your problems," said he, twirling his r's with unction.

Seeing that there was no help for it, Dale did so succinctly.

"The apartment-house; the decadent village."

"How is the apartment-house a problem?"

"That is for you to find out, Sonny," said Dale, applying himself to grape-nut pudding, which he detested.

"Wait till you've tried to live in one!" suggested Robbins, who, with his alert, squirrel-like poses, and



round, red cheeks, looked absurdly young to be the only married man in the class. He was the paid superintendent of the Howard Avenue Sunday-school, attached to a church which spent five thousand a year upon its choir, and economized in its workers' salaries.

"He means that there is a class," explained Griggs. "Floating sort of people, you know. Dr. Dwight was saying —"

" 'Why drag in Velasquez?' " quoted Fulkerson, with a drawl. "You're stealing Dale's thunder."

Dale glanced his way.

"It was not my thunder," said he, imperturbably.

" 'Decadent village' — 'decadent village' — that reminds me of something . . . what?"

" 'The Deserted Village,' " prompted Fulkerson, joining his finger-tips over his plate, and regarding them affectionately. Fulkerson was the student with social aspirations. To be in the world but not of it appeared to him as the fine flower of a distinguished career. However, it was necessary to be in it, first, and this aim he pursued with unacknowledged rancor, Providence having denied him an effective setting to start with. He cherished ideals of becoming an apostle of higher culture to women of the right setting. For those in his Bible class he made abstracts of the lessons, and left the envelopes on the table in the main hall, that the other men might note the extent of his correspondence. The girls heckled him. It was not known whether he was aware of this.

"And which of the two do you mean to tackle, Dale?"

Fulkerson answered for him.

"That remains to be seen — eventually."

There was a sting in the tail of this, as with many of his remarks. Instead of waiting for the highest bid before accepting a call, Dale had agreed to serve a pastorless church in the thankless capacity of "temporary supply." He was not at all sorry for what he had done, yet he avoided Louis Fulkerson when he could. Louie rubbed it in so!

"I know the kind of run-down, poverty-struck little place."

"Did I say that it must needs be poverty-struck to be decadent?"

"They gave me a call from one," Bluff resumed. "A 'Come over to Macedonia and help us' business. Of course I couldn't consider it."

As Chandler was suspected of receiving aid from the seminary, Griggs replied with ill-concealed disdain:

"You might have helped them out for six months."

"Yes; and lost my chances. I tell you, if a fellow loses a chance at the beginning he never overtakes it. With the dead line sneaking forward all the time —"

"There is no dead line where I am going."

"Really, that is a pity on some accounts," said Fulkerson. "Remember that man from West Africa who spoke here last term? His views were as narrow as the shoulders of his coat. Said he was glad to be going back, America seemed so selfish to him. That's the trouble with those fellows, they get out of touch with civilization; their own little institution is all they can think of. When I was calling upon Miss Bradford the other evening —"

("Couldn't she get away? 'Sister Ann, Sister Ann, do you see any one coming?'" murmured some one.)

"— she said that if the World were Scylla, and the

Other World, Charybdis, some people would succeed in keeping themselves out of both. I thought that pretty good."

Robbins drummed softly on the under side of the table. Chandler spoke.

"You'll be coming back from India in ten years to pass the hat, Griggs."

"With a narrow coat."

"Worse opinions."

"No hope for you, old man. Ludovicus dixit."

Griggs pushed back his chair, and stood up. It could then be seen that he was tall, as well as broad-shouldered. As he faced his classmates, a twinkle in his eyes, there was something of the good-natured mastiff in his expression.

"But his soul at least was perfect, and he cried,
 'Though I am fated,
Screw my hinges up, and then I will depa-a-art, —
Screw my hinges up, and then I will depart!'"

he chanted. "Are you ready, Cherub?" "Cherub" was his name for Dale, whom he overtopped by a head. Dale liked the nickname well enough, though he could look things at any one who was unpleasantly familiar.

It was well known that, for a man who showed his liking for human beings so plainly, Gordon Dale was singularly reserved. He had left the seminary at the end of his first year, and again afterward, coming back to finish his course with a younger class. These gaps he had never tried to account for. On one occasion the president, Dr. Dwight, anxious not to lose a promising

student, had hinted delicately that in case of any financial difficulty the Students' Aid Fund could be placed at his disposal. Dale had responded by a smile which had made the good doctor feel for the moment as if he were talking to a man of his own age, and had declined the offer. Deep-seated pride, thought the president, and liked him better for it, for in his heart he wondered sometimes whether, if the way into the ministry were made harder instead of easier, the resulting product would not be more satisfactory.

For the rest, there was nothing mysterious about Dale, save that he kept his own counsel, and talked little of himself. No one had heard him speak of his home or his family. In this he seemed a more detached individual than Griggs, whose family were all over in Madura.

Still with his arm around Dale's shoulders, Griggs opened the door of his room, and shoved him in.

"That fellow *riles* me!" he exclaimed. "He has a wriggle in his back when he walks, and a wriggle in his voice when he talks. I want to get behind him and punch him. I want to hear him say, 'Ow!'"

"Our dear brother Louie," said Dale, blandly. "Do you know Miss Waite, that blond flyaway with the engaging lisp? Louie asked her in Bible class if she prayed over the assemblies. She said: 'No, Mr. Fulkerthon, I uth my common senth.'"

"Did she? Did she? They did it on purpose, then, when they passed the chocolate cake the other way around the table, at the last church supper. I saw Louie steer for that place; I had my eye on him when the plate came back to him empty. Afterward, they got off a parody on Mrs. Leo Hunter, with the soft

pedal down — something about ‘theologues . . . expiring frogs.’ She called them ‘fwoags . . . expiwing fwoags.’ It made it more pointed, somehow. I’m afraid of those girls!”

Dale laughed. It was a peculiar laugh, a low bass reverberation; his shoulders shook up and down gently.

“No need; you’re safe.” He left himself out of the question. He generally did this.

“You’re not easily influenced,” said Griggs, in admiration. “You are not pugnacious; you simply set that Chinese face of yours and keep along in your own track, but you don’t budge an inch.”

“Neither do you,” answered Dale, quietly.

“I almost wish I did,” said Griggs, beginning to pace the room. “Gordon, you don’t know how hard it is for me to go back to India! We’ve been dosed with the country, we’ve had it served up to us as literary material, and I, for one, feel nauseated. It isn’t only the rottenness of everything, the ‘failed A. B.,’ the Babus, the stagnation — yes, yes,” he interrupted himself, as three measured thumps sounded on the ceiling below, and, taking his umbrella, he pounded on the floor in response. (“Jones makes more racket trying to break me of walking the floor than I ever make doing it, but it’s his noise, not mine, I suppose.”) “No, it’s that artificial life under an alien government that goes against me. It gives security, but I’d rather take my chances without the security somewhere where I could help to build up a free national life. In China, now, for instance; to develop a Chinese national consciousness, to strip Christianity of its Western egotisms and superfluities, and think it into Chinese — that’s a big dream!”

"Are you sure, Tom, that it's not the dream for you?" asked Dale. It was not the first time that he had asked the question.

"I've got to go back," Griggs answered, with set jaw. He crossed the room again.

"The thought of the women harrows me," he went on, in a lower tone. "They're such little, undersized things. I shall want to pick them up and carry them; and it's little enough I shall have to do with them. If it were not for Janet — but she is with me, heart and soul."

Dale was silent. He had met Miss Clover, and she seemed to him a very ordinary girl. Was it necessary, for a woman to lead a devoted life, that she should be devoid of charm?

Well, it would all be over soon. He was going to miss it so! Professor Barus, who yelled in moments of enthusiasm, the chorus rehearsals, the blond flyaway with whom he had exchanged delicious comments upon the comedy of things, and who cared for him not at all, as he very well knew. Nor did he care for her, but he liked the companionship; he was hungry for that.

An hour later, he stood by his own window, looking down into a cloistered yard, — a little man who had started well in his bones. The bones were amply covered; there was no leanness in his aspect. He had a well-shaped head, with very dark eyes and hair, smooth cheeks, and a brown skin with plenty of fresh color underneath. It was a face, with its composure, and its repressed enjoyment of situations, eminently provocative, — to some, of irritation, to others, of heightened interest, as when the footlights are turned

on before the play begins. This man turned on lights, in other words, he was a natural observer. Whether he was a thinker as well, remained to be seen. His eyes laughed often, his mouth was discreet. Just at this moment it was something more; it was hard.

“Good old Tom,” he murmured to himself; “going back to India because his father was cut off young by cholera, and he wants to fill his place for him. Mother and two old maid sisters over there at the same station. No money, and the world may never hear much about him; but I envy him. He has a home — that he can call his own.”

CHAPTER TWO

GORDON DALE was in his first parish nine months. A more exacting post for a man just turned out into the world it would have been hard to find. Afterward, he was glad of the apprenticeship. Owing to differences among the committee, Pilgrim Church, a large down-town church in the heart of an eastern city, had been long enough without a settled pastor for the congregation to regard each new candidate as a source of intellectual dissipation. Their perfect leader had not risen on the horizon. He must have an established reputation, of course, tact, magnetism, prestige — and youth. Meanwhile, they were becoming demoralized. Dale found himself in the position of the classic boy who stopped the leak in the dike, and was unable to move in consequence. Nevertheless, after a time, he began to feel stirrings of power within him to bring order out of chaos, if he could be allowed a free hand.

It was not to be. He had been called there as a stop-gap, and such he remained.

"We want our minister to have social experience," declared Mrs. Pelham.

Mrs. Pelham's own social experience dated back a few years to the discovery of her claim to be enrolled among the Colonial Dames. Since then she had shone prominently in the affairs of the town like a light concealed hitherto under a bushel, and had once

headed a petition for funds to rescue a historic house from decay. Her dress showed the aspiring mind. She was stout, with broad shoulders, and she seemed to be falling backward when she walked. A woman of energy, one would have said, seeing her bear down through the church parlors at the Christmas festival. It was certainly not the minister's fault that the holly hung too low, or that a sword-like twig in the bunch under the chandelier ran through the chiffon of her hat, and arrested her stately progress with a jerk. Dale relieved her of her coffee-cup, and stood by, a cup in either hand, while she strove to extricate herself; but he did not rush to the disentanglement himself, as she vaguely felt that he should have done.

"I never saw anything so careless! As if we were all pygmies," she exclaimed, glancing angrily down at the sleek head close by.

"Can you not remove the bonnet?" asked the minister, meekly.

Mrs. Pelham took out her hat-pins, and climbed upon a chair to disentangle her hat, but from that night, so far as she was concerned, Dale's doom was sealed.

"I detest a man who is always grinning," she said to her husband.

"Eh? What tangent are you flying off at now?" Mr. Pelham inquired, looking up from his newspaper. "Fellow's quiet enough; I've hardly heard him laugh. I wish he would, instead of shaking up and down as he does. It makes me want to break out myself."

"He's grinning inside," said Mrs. Pelham.

"Well, I can't stop that, can I?" he asked.

The vesper service was the showy service at Pilgrim Church. It was soothing to sit in the fading light,

comfortably pursuing a mundane train of thought, while the organ discoursed Loretz' "Black Prophet" or the "Vorspiel" to Lohengrin.

One Sunday afternoon a man drifted into church with the rest. He was recovering from an operation, and time hung on his hands. He longed to get home to work, for he was a doctor with a large practice, although he was young. He had analyzed his own case for his doctors, differing with them stubbornly upon a point in which the operation had shown him to be right. A man of deep feeling for all things human, he seldom went to church because, in his own slow growth, he had drifted away from the old without finding the new.

The sermon was well under way when a small dog, a very small terrier which had somehow made his way in behind some late comer, pattered up the aisle toward the platform. Dale saw him out of the corner of his eye, and hesitated. The terrier did not; he mounted the pulpit and hastened toward the minister, with tail wagging hopefully. Dale bent, examined him more closely, and turned toward the audience.

"I ask your patience a moment, friends; the animal is bleeding," he explained, and disappeared behind the tall pulpit. A quick, tearing sound followed, and he wrapped half of his handkerchief around the sore, and slipped a couple of elastic bands from his sermon case over it.

"Lie down," he commanded.

There was a pause, but not a silent one.

"Lie down, lie down, sir," Dale reiterated in an embarrassed whisper, trying to check these inconvenient demonstrations. He was not used to dogs.

The audience were divided between smiles and frowns. The man at the back of the church leaned forward, smiling oddly. At the same moment Dale's face rose over the pulpit cushion, red but composed.

"It needs no argument to show —" he resumed, in a round, deliberate tone, going back to the beginning of his paragraph, and so brought his sermon to a close.

"And a very decent sermon, too," was Dr. Kent's comment. Not that it proved anything to his mind; his questions were not to be settled by a callow youth fresh from some theological school; but he liked the man's acceptance of the situation. It had the natural touch. When he got back to his lodgings he wrote a letter.

The next Sunday, three men entered the church together. The first two paused to confer with the third, who shook his head impatiently, and slipped into the nearest pew. The others went forward to a conspicuous front seat. One was tall and lank. His hat dangled like an inverted basin from his limp left hand, which he supported on his right wrist. The other man was short from the knees down, and his shoes creaked. Dale gave them a haughty glance.

"Advertising themselves as a committee. I have half a mind to refuse," said he to himself. Nevertheless, he could not help preaching to them, and delayed coming down from the pulpit because he was conscious that he had done so.

"Good morning. Let me present myself. . . . Deacon Branch of Waukomis, and this is Brother Lemmon. That was an excellent sermon you gave us this morning."

"You are very good," said Dale. He wondered why

Deacon Branch of Waukomis did not speak in his natural voice, instead of that sibilant whisper. It was the voice that went with that hair, parted at the back of the head and brought around over the top to hide a bald spot.

"Do you see Dr. Kent, Brother Lemmon?" continued the deacon, rising on tiptoe to look over the retreating heads of the congregation. "He would not come forward with us. I am afraid he has gone, he is so very —"

"There he is!" exclaimed Mr. Lemmon.

David Kent turned around from the wall tablet he was examining. He had stooped to read it, for he was very tall. He leaned negligently against the pew and waited for the others to approach, looking bored.

"Dr. Kent dropped the committee a line advising us to come down to hear you preach. Let us introduce Dr. Kent."

The two young men looked at each other with instant liking. David Kent stretched out a large, bony hand.

"I have nothing to do with it," he said. "What did you do to that dog?"

This was how Gordon Dale came to encounter his second problem.

At first he did not think of it as a problem. It was spring. The brown hills smoked with blue haze, the river uncoiled itself like a moiré ribbon. Waukomis was the center of a rich tobacco and farming district. Two or three small factories nestled on the river banks outside of the village. The usual soldiers' monument, praiseworthy in sentiment if of indifferent execution, stood on the Green. Little was left of

colonial times besides two or three old houses, which stood back from the street in a reserve which spoke of fallen fortunes. Newer houses in some cases imitated their pillared verandas unsuccessfully, or threw out a tower here or a bay there, or a plate glass window. Their shallow front lawns were dotted with hydrangeas in emulation of Oak Lodge, the Gilmores' show place upon the hill, and watered daily in dry weather. It was not the largest town in the valley, but the ameliorated conditions of country living were suggested by its trimly modern aspect, and Waukomis was conscious of the fact.

Dale felt the stimulus at first. Things had been against him for years. Now they would take a turn. Now he had found a niche. He was anxious to prove himself. Who was he, to act as spiritual father to these shrewd, middle-aged men and women, who slipped in their English occasionally, and spoke with faulty intonations, but who were very conscious of their material advantages, their telephones, their rural free deliveries? He preached his first sermons with stress, went home in abasement of spirit, and dramatized the scene to himself afterward.

"Expiring frog," said he to himself, and felt better.

He made notes in his neat little note-book like the following:

Remind committee about my kitchen faucet.

Woman spoke to me after service, Sunday. Good face, kind eyes, nervous, talked all over her face. Find out name.

See Billy.

~~Call on Mrs. Akers.~~

Read over Wordsworth.

It had been his habit to make notes on the blank space of his calendar, but when he found that Joanna, the parsonage factotum, scanned it as a matter of course to keep herself informed of events, he felt that his mind was too much outdoors. Joanna herself, with her scanty pompadour, her figured chocolate sateen, and her accent, delighted him by being true to type. He was not a New Englander, himself.

Then, after a few weeks, the freshness faded. He began to feel undercurrents.

"A village is not the world in miniature; it is a world with its elements out of proportion," said Dr. Kent.

He lit his cigar at a small boat-shaped lamp on a corner table, left the wick burning, and seated himself in a second chair covered with russet leather like the one he had offered his guest. He had cut loose from village customs so far as to dine at night. The dinner had been plain, but it had been served in a sophisticated fashion to which Joanna was a stranger. Dale felt the difference.

"What is the missing element?" he inquired.

"Chiefly, men of the sort who give tone to a place. There are enough of the present generation to keep things moving, but the upward push of new growth is lacking. Old families are dying out. Heaven only knows what fatal blight is on some of them! Burdens which would be easy enough, shared among three or four, fall upon a single one, and crush out life. It is melancholy."

"I wonder why you are here," suggested Dale.

"Well, that is a good reason, isn't it? Besides, I love the old place. I have worked up a better practice

here at home than I could have done in ten years in a city. For all that, if I were a minister, I would rather preach in the slums. Life ferments here . . . it turns sour. I have a patient now who is all run down. I went to school with her; she is younger than I am. I am giving her a tonic, and you will give her sermons, and neither of us will dare to tell her that her troubles have come from marrying a fellow of anemic type, with his teeth half gold and his brains half water, just because he was the only man available."

"Perhaps, under the circumstances, the tonic and the sermon are worth more than analysis."

Dr. Kent folded his arms on the arm of his chair and leaned forward on them, — a favorite attitude of his when in earnest.

"Dale, what do you expect to accomplish here?"

Dale considered a minute before replying.

"'Thy Kingdom come.' I am here for that."

"That phrase has been in use for nearly two thousand years. How much do you think it means to most people?"

"I will tell you what it means to me," Dale answered; "it means something divinely social. Picture if you can a whole community fired by the social spirit of Christianity. Can you not think how much more interesting human beings would become to one another, how much more experimental and adventurous their relations would be? There would be room for the free play of the spirit upon its surroundings, plenty of room for faults, for the crude, the maimed, the imperfect; but that community would be full of life, and the life would not turn sour."

Dr. Kent smoked steadily in silence. They had arrived at this stage early in their acquaintance.

"Have you been past Oak Lodge yet?" he asked, presently.

"Is that the rambling place on the hill above me, with rough stone in the lower story? Yes. It has the finest view of the river."

"So Gilmore thought, and because he has money to burn he has remodeled the place to run up to for a week or two, now and then. He is *the* Gilmore. Does that convey any idea to you?"

"I have heard something about his reputation, but we had small leisure at the seminary to discuss business. I dare say it was different at medical college."

"There you have me. Well, he has won success, — with the bloom off, you understand. He is very domestic, very good to his family; that sort of man generally is. He has nothing to bring him up here, no roots, no kinsfolk; but, as often as they alight for a few days, the village is hypnotized by the millions, and does not return to its normal state until the family are gone. We think ourselves cultured, but what we really care for is crude power, — what we can see, what we can handle, what we can gossip about."

"Do not believe all he says! My husband finds fault with everything. A sign of old age, I tell him," said Mrs. Kent, coming back into the room with her long coat over her arm. She had an oval face, narrow and delicate, a sallow skin, and small, sharp teeth. Her black hair separated into silky strands, her eyebrows were plaintively arched, and her restless eyes, glancing obliquely in all directions, had dark circles under them. She wore a pale blue voile of provincial

cut; its lines of shirring looked from a distance like the cross-hatching of a bad drawing. She was going to her whist club.

Dale rose to hold her wrap, as she meant that he should. Dr. Kent looked on lazily.

"I merely remarked that Waukomis is not a soil that grows all the social virtues."

"It's no worse than any other poky little place," said Ada, lightly. Deep in her own mind was the determination to get away from it as soon as possible. She intended that David should move to Burford. She would be able to manage it; she had always managed David.

"We have some pleasant people here," she went on. "Mrs. Hitchcock entertains the club beautifully. I suppose you don't play whist, Mr. Dale?" Her laugh was rather affected. "Then, there are the Sutherlands, and the Gilmores, when they are here. They have such a lovely house!"

"With the interior of which Waukomis has little to do," interpolated her husband.

"We exchange calls."

"I was not aware that Mrs. Gilmore had returned your call."

"She was out of health all last summer; Miss Gilmore told me so," said Ada, quickly. Two red spots showed in her cheeks.

"Is the boy all right?"

"He is asleep," she answered, carelessly. The red spots were still there as she rustled down-stairs. How tactless of David to blurt out before Mr. Dale that the Gilmores had not returned their call! She felt vexed with Dale for having heard. She had been looking

forward to the new man's arrival because he was young, and therefore more likely to be "congenial," by which she meant, interested in her. Ada, to herself, was always a romantic object, impressing herself as vividly upon other people's imaginations as she did upon her own, and she always thought herself the center of every situation. She had even occupied her mind with conversations to take place in future, when she would heighten the impression of herself as a mysterious being, difficult to understand, for this was how she liked to think of herself. A chance word had ruffled her vanity, and spoiled all. Dale, she thought, was not at all what she had expected. She did not think she would like him.

When the front door had closed behind her, the doctor got up.

"I think I'll take a look at him," he said; "do you want to come?"

Dale followed him into the bedroom, where a lovely boy of two with blond curls lay asleep in his crib. Moving on tiptoe, Dr. Kent drew the blanket higher. He worshiped his child; his wife he was very far from worshipping.

He had married a girl whose seeming delicacy of temperament appealed to him, only to find that her languor was more apparent than real, while her habit of posing to herself made her incapable of comprehending his need of tenderness in return. Before his wedding-day was over he had realized his mistake. Since then he had hated anniversaries and tender occasions.

"David has no more sentiment than a pair of tongs," declared Ada Kent; and he only smiled a sardonic

smile, and never contradicted. Yet he remained fond of his wife.

He was a singular looking man. His dun skin appeared darker than his fair hair, which lent something incongruous to his aspect. One thick lock had a habit of falling slantwise across his square forehead, where two vertical folds deepened at critical moments. His eyes were deeply set under bushy, straight brows. There was more color in them than anywhere else in his face, but while they looked at one it was hard to say what color they were. He had an admirable nose, and a much less admirable mouth; the long, loose upper lip could twist itself into a dozen enigmatical expressions. He bolted into a room, head and shoulders in advance of his body, and moved about abruptly, with the step that never disturbs. His voice was low, but harsh, and he was secretly sensitive over it, but it had tender tones at times, as his patients knew.

Waukomis had passed through three stages of feeling with regard to Dr. Kent's ways; bewilderment, resentment, and final acceptance. "Our doctor is such an original!" they said, not without pride in him as a feature of the town.

The den to which they had returned was carpeted with grass matting, and hung with sage-green burlap. The figured curtains drew, masculine fashion, on pulleys. Books were along one wall; a medical journal and "*La Terre Qui Meurt*," face down, on the table. There were carbon photographs; a Rembrandt head, a haunting, full-length figure by Vedder, a remarkable view of Madison Square by night; something contradictory and romantic, like — oh, yes, like

the man's own face. Dale took up a photograph on the mantel, a half length of a girl in evening dress, with hands clasped lightly behind her. The face had charm, piquancy, and some latent sweetness.

"Miss Shirley DeForest," explained Dr. Kent, seeing the movement. Dale put the picture back quickly.

"Was that Miss DeForest?" he asked. He was a little shocked.

"Taken ten years ago, when I was in college. We grew up together, only while I was a hobbledehoy, and Lieutenant DeForest called me Daddy Longlegs, she was out in society. He was home that summer on leave, and their house was full of people coming and going. I used to see her at church, wearing a white hat with a long feather; I thought it the loveliest thing out. Every time I was asked there, I went in terror of the tall vases her brother had brought home from China. 'We'll guy it to a stake, Dave; then it won't capsize,' he said, and actually tied one to the leg of the table. I put a mighty safe distance between me and that vase!

"The family went to Washington that winter, and then abroad. We used to hear that she was going to marry this or that one, but it came to nothing. I think she cared more for her brother than for any one on earth. One day a fire broke out in the sail-room of DeForest's ship. He was the first one to reach the men. They brought him out dead."

He paused a moment. Both saw the scene in imagination.

"Mr. DeForest never held up his head after that. He lost his judgment and his property dwindled away.

Mrs. DeForest took to morphia. Shirley was their mainstay. It was hard upon her, for she was not a care-taker by instinct. She lives there all alone now, like a lady of the manor. She is more ready to do things for others than to let them do things for her, but it is always in her own way, never according to rule."

Stories everywhere, thought Dale, with the interest of a lover of types, as he walked home on the wet asphalt, while the electric lights flickered and died down overhead. He cared more for life than for novels. For the stories in books must be rounded to an end, but in real life they go on after the event. He wondered a little about Miss Shirley DeForest.

CHAPTER THREE

A LANE frayed out from the river road, above the town, and lost itself in a tangle of underbrush. On one side rose the hill, crowned above by the grove of white oaks which gave Oak Lodge its name; on the other stood three or four low-roofed cottages, each with its untidy yard. A rubbish heap beside the bushes was piled high with tin cans and broken bottles. Gordon Dale, turning into the lane for the first time, looked out of place in his surroundings.

"Do they belong to my parish?" he wondered. "I must find out."

The door of the last cottage stood ajar, and from within came grating sounds of clothes being rubbed on a wash-board. He knocked. All sounds ceased for a moment, then a woman opened the door just enough to put her head and shoulders around it. Her wrapper was soaked in front. Her hair hung in wisps about her flushed face, and she had a side upper tooth missing. She was young, and had once been pretty, with the sort of prettiness more unattractive than downright ugliness to a man of Dale's stamp.

"I am sorry to disturb you, but will you be so kind as to give me a glass of water?" he asked.

The woman sighed involuntarily, and going out to the pump with a tumbler, began to turn the handle.

"Let me do that," he urged. She yielded the tumbler. He filled it, and took a long draught.

"I was very thirsty," he said, turning with a smile, to discover that he was speaking to the air. The woman had gone back to the house. Somewhat discomfited, he advanced to the doorway, and saw her once more at her tub, with her back to him. It was a weak looking back, suggesting neither muscles nor nerve. There was nothing near him to set the glass upon.

"Where shall I put the tumbler, please?" he asked.

As she turned around for the second time, a child peeped at him from the folds of her skirt. He had the dimpled outlines Murillo loved to paint, but his hair was silky red.

"Come here, my little man," began the minister.

"Go, speak to the gentleman, Joey," said his mother with perfunctory civility, but Joey shook his head. Now, if Dale had been wise, he would have left it there, but his treatment had embarrassed him. He swung the boy up to his shoulders.

"This is the way the farmer rides, hobblety gee!" said he. The child burst into a loud roar, and he hastily set him down.

"Dear me, I did not mean to make him cry," he apologized, darkly red and very uncomfortable.

"He's afraid of strangers," said the mother.

"I wonder if you belong to my congregation," he continued. "I am Mr. Dale."

She gave him a quick, furtive glance.

"No," she answered, and he felt himself dismissed.

"Do you know what young woman lives in that lane off from the river road?" he asked the treasurer of his church, Mr. Hitchcock, meeting him in the street.

"Quite on the edge of the town. Her little boy has red hair."

Mr. Ruel Hitchcock was a portly man with iron-grey hair, a double chin, and small eyes set close together. He was the proprietor of the only department store in Waukomis, and was credited with being much richer than he gave himself out to be. He dressed badly because he could afford it. His gray felt hat was stained with perspiration, and he wore a ragged shirt in the pride of not being proud.

A sapient look overspread his heavy countenance.

"Ah, yes, I believe the girl does live up that way," he said, lowering his tone significantly. "Mrs. Hitchcock has given her employment sometimes. A pretty bad case."

When a man says "a bad case" in that tone it means but one thing. Dale did not stay to hear more. The manner was offensive. He preferred to ask his housekeeper for information.

That girl? Oh, that was Myrtie Cole.

"Does she belong to our parish?"

"I suppose so, as much as anywhere. My bread will burn," said Joanna, hastily.

"One moment, Joanna. Am I any harder to talk to than Mrs. Purple, next door?"

Mrs. Purple was Mr. Lowry's housekeeper, and between her and Joanna was an ancient and honorable feud.

"Do you think I'd tell *her* anything?"

"If you mean that the child is illegitimate, say so."

"That's it," said Joanna, subdued by the minister's business-like manner.

"Where is the father?"

"He was in Jerome, Arizona, the last I heard. They say her mother was as much to blame as she was. She never had any bringing-up."

"Does she live respectably now?"

"I never heard that she didn't. She takes in washing. Some let her do theirs; they get it cheap."

Next day the minister went up the lane again. Myrtie Cole's door was locked, and no one answered his knock. To add to his perplexity, he perceived that he was watched from behind the curtain. He sat down on a stone at the corner, and considered. He did not mean to be balked.

"Morning is the time," he decided, and ran his quarry to earth a few days later, just as she had staggered out into the yard with a heavy basket of clothes. At sight of him she started.

"Good morning," said Dale, offering his hand. "I have heard your story. You are trying to live a straight life, aren't you?"

She turned a dull brick color, and her hand hung limp from his.

"Well, I'm trying," she answered; "but it's dreadful hard where everybody's against you."

"Not everybody. How do you get along with your work?"

"Oh, I get along somehow. If I was stronger I presume it would come easier, but — well, I get along."

"Do not let me hinder you now. I will wait."

Myrtie Cole had always obeyed the stronger voice. Mechanically she filled her mouth with clothes-pins, and became aware that a small, plump hand was holding the other end of the heavy sheet to the line.

"You'll get wet," she mumbled, not daring to look at him.

"Not at all," said Dale, reaching for the next piece. It chanced to be a night-dress, and he essayed to pin it by its crossed sleeves. Myrtie checked a titter.

"You haven't got it right," she explained, laughing openly at the sound of his laugh. Dale suspended a row of stockings handsomely by the toes, using clothespins so lavishly that she re-possessed herself of them when his back was turned. Between them they soon had the basket empty.

"Now, won't you please ask me in for a minute?"

She scurried to place a chair for him, and sat down a little way off, clasping and unclasping her parboiled hands in her lap. Then he perceived that she was afraid of him. He had not thought of that before.

"It is about Joey," he began, smiling at seeing the little boy reconnoitering behind the pantry door. The smile fell on Myrtie Cole like a ray of sunshine upon a drabbed flower. "He is not old enough yet for Sunday school?"

"Oh, no, sir. He's only a little over two."

"We keep a list of the youngest ones. I should like to have his name on that list. Then he will belong to the Sunday school, and will come when he is old enough." He took out his pen to write the certificate.

"But—but," faltered Myrtie, "they will—I'm not going to have him go anywhere to be laughed at!"

"I think I can promise," said the minister, "that he will not be laughed at."

Joey, fascinated at the sight of a pen which had to

be joggled over one's arm to make it go, crept nearer. The man was not looking at him—he saw him, nevertheless—so he stole up to lay a confiding hand on the minister's new tweed coat. Alas! even the gods cannot take back their gifts. Dale showed the smudge to Joanna.

"Can you get it off, Joanna?"

"Give it here. Why, it's molasses! What you been doing to get molasses on you, Mr. Dale?"

"Just the day's work. One of those accidents that a man of average foresight is not looking for."

"Tchick!" said Joanna. It sounded like a sneeze, but it was a laugh. Joanna Smith, spinster, aged forty-seven, was enjoying the time of her life.

Mrs. Sutherland was the president of the Home Department of the Sunday school, which consisted of herself, Mrs. Hitchcock, and Miss Cornelia Prindle. The same week they held a meeting at the parsonage. The minister had been called down cellar to speak to the plumber's man, Joanna explained. The ladies answered graciously that they would wait, and rustled into the study, which they inspected with sidelong glances.

"He didn't have it done over, after all," said Mrs. Sutherland in a hushed, breathy tone.

"No, he said he would wait until next spring."

"Fortunately for the church, for I'm sure I don't know how we could have raised the money. The chapel roof leaks again. We shall have to have a kirmess. I saw something in the *Hearthstone* about a Carnival of Days that sounded pretty."

"It don't seem as if I could stand the wear and tear of another kirmess," said Mrs. Hitchcock, an elderly

woman with a harassed face. "If we could only get the money outright."

"Why, we can't," said Mrs. Sutherland; "at least, we couldn't unless —"

"I always say that people with money can do so much if you can only get them interested," said Mrs. Hitchcock, answering her unspoken thought.

"Do you know when they are coming back?" whispered Mrs. Sutherland.

"Sam Foskitt heard some time in July," said Miss Cornelia, glad to have information to give. Miss Nelie, as she called herself, was in the late thirties, when a woman crystallizes unless she is well shaken. She had the softness of skin which sometimes accompanies thin dark hair, and a little mouth pursed up in utterable opinions. Being short, with broad hips, she wore a large hat trimmed with feathers. Mrs. Sutherland, glancing her way, reflected that it was a mistake to mix sets in church work.

"They have a new motor car that cost six thousand dollars."

"And Ruth Gilmore runs it. Well, if she lolls around on Shirley DeForest's grounds all summer, it is nothing to me. As Mr. Dale seems to be having a long interview with the plumber, suppose we begin our meeting."

Mrs. Sutherland closed her eyes, and, as they bent forward decorously, murmured a few sentences of prayer, at the end of which all three looked instantaneously relieved.

"Now," she began in a different tone; "Granny Akers was on your list, Miss Prindle, I think?"

"She won't join," said Miss Nelie. "She says she'd as soon join a Cradle Roll. I've been there twice to see

her. She roams the woods the whole enduring time. They say she sleeps outdoors summer nights."

"I can't fancy her with a quarterly. She is half heathen. I wonder what Mr. Dale wanted to get her in for?"

"He says she gets so much out of life."

All three looked blank.

"Well, I've done my part," said Miss Nelie, with a little toss of her head.

"Miss Shirley is the only one who can do anything with Granny Akers."

"Yes, but Shirley DeForest won't do anything; she just sits back on her Old Family. I believe in organized effort myself." Mrs. Sutherland spoke with some irritation. She belonged to what was known as the younger set. Her hair was thinning a little, but she had matched it carefully, and she had a really good figure, and shopped twice a year in New York. Mr. Sutherland was cashier of the bank. They had built a house just off from Main Street, with a side porch enclosed in glass, where she sat afternoons in elaborate white waists and white mohair skirt. The grounds, as they were called in Waukomis, sloped down to the street, and on either side of the path were clumps of small retinisporas. It was the general opinion that hydrangeas would have made more show.

"Now, as to Mrs. Gilmore," she went on, "don't you think for the good of the church that one of us ought to call?"

Mrs. Hitchcock's worn face looked actually frightened.

"I don't know. I've heard she wasn't very —"

"She's been pleasant enough to me," said Mrs.

Sutherland. "I know your list is full, and perhaps it would be better for the president to go; but of course if you'd rather, Mrs. Hitchcock — ?"

"No, I'd rather you would," the other answered. Neither suggested Miss Nelie. She would not have dared to ring the Gilmores' bell, and they knew it. Feeling ignored, she took up a foreign post-card from the desk, and Dale, coming in a moment later, saw her reading the message on its reverse side. It was the minister who blushed.

"There is one other whom this department ought to reach," said he, after preliminary matters had been discussed. "I refer to Myrtie Cole."

The atmosphere of the room changed as if the thermometer had dropped several degrees.

"My list is crowded," said Mrs. Sutherland, speaking with deep absorption in the paper she held. "Mrs. Hitchcock has all she can do, haven't you, Mrs. Hitchcock?"

Dale turned inquiringly to the elder woman.

"I couldn't," she replied, nervously; "I've given her work. I don't see what more I can do."

"Miss Prindle?"

"Ma wouldn't let me," Miss Nelie answered, blushing. She regarded herself as quite a little girl.

"I am sorry, ladies," said Dale. "This is one of the cases where a man can do very little without women to help him. It is not a society call I am asking of you, but something different."

"Well, we will talk it over another time," said Mrs. Sutherland, briskly. "I have an engagement at four, and I must hurry, or I shall be late."

Dale realized as well as if he had been told so that

his motion was indefinitely postponed, but he felt helpless in the face of their passive resistance. He bowed them out of the front door, diffusing, as they went, mingled odors of sachet powder. Then he returned to his study, and threw open a window.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHERE the two driveways of Main Street, curving around the lower end of the Green, became one, in front of the town hall, a road branched off to the southeast along the river. A few yards down this road a path at right angles to it led by a rustic bridge across a brook to a house standing by itself upon a side hill. This house presented in front a lawn at four different levels; the narrow terraces were clipped with care, and the blunt grass blades sparkled with innumerable drops of dew. A long flight of steps ascended to the front door. On the highest plateau a clump of maples had grown old before the windows. Their branches extended right and left like arms.

Dr. Kent, turning up from the main road with a fresh horse and a newly washed buggy, glanced at the house front in disapproval.

"Too much screened; too solitary," he said to himself.

He stopped his horse in the drive. There was a long sweep of turf on this side. The south door stood open, and the large house had an air of sedate cheerfulness. A little figure was coming around the corner of the yard, with her hands in the pockets of her long holland apron. He waved his hand.

At a distance Miss Shirley DeForest looked young on account of her figure, and the poise of her head. Nearer,

her hair was seen to be grey. Its uniform tint was in itself beautiful, and would have made a piquant setting for a face with more color, but the skin was too dead a white, the sharp sweep of her dark brows too distinct. They gave her the look of a fairy godmother. There were faint lines at the corners of her mouth, and there was something else in her face impossible to describe, as of one prematurely blighted, who would remain what she was forever, neither old nor young.

She was a little woman with long arms. Her nose was delicately aquiline. She held her chin up a trifle, and had a way of standing with her hands behind her. Her step was light and free, more from habit than from elasticity, for it was a long time now since she had felt well.

"How many minutes to spare this morning?" she asked without preamble.

"About fifteen. I started early on purpose."

"Come and see my grosbeak."

He followed her into the garden, which ran up-hill at the back, and had a great square enclosed with box on one side of the gravel path, and a lemon verbena, as tall as a small tree, on the other.

"Where is it?"

"In the white lilac bush; on that little branch not four feet from the ground."

"Yes, I see it."

"Do you want to put your hand on him?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I couldn't get near it. Let me see you do it."

She approached the bush, bent over silently, and stroked the spotted ball with two fingers. The bird looked at her, with head sunk a little in his feathers;

his breathing was scarce disturbed. There was a slight commotion in a tree close by, and the male grosbeak's rosy neck glowed between the leaves. Miss DeForest stepped back a few feet. The bird eyed her a moment, and then flew into the bush.

"Very pretty," was Dr. Kent's comment. "How long have you been at that?"

"Since yesterday. I am so afraid a cat will find them."

"I have something for you that needs the same handling that you gave that bird. Do you know the Johnsons on the Sweetwater road?"

"I think not. Are they farmers?"

"Yes. The man used to send milk to the dairy, but it was not up to the standard, and was rejected. I have no patience with the family. They go on living in the ruts of thirty years ago, without a single labor-saving invention in the house; even the egg-beater was broken, I found, when I ordered raw eggs for the woman. She lies in a bedroom eight by ten, with the paper shades rattling in the breeze. If I could get her outdoors into a hammock she would be better, but she has no interest in any possible alleviations; she only cares for impossible ones. She has the New England temperament bottled up . . . can't get the cork out without an explosion."

"And you with such a liking for explosions," commented Miss DeForest, drily.

"I'd rather perform an operation any day. Explosions are unnecessary. People ought to be themselves whatever their circumstances. They ought to find some outlet for themselves, instead of flying to pieces; it's abnormal."

"There you go again," said Miss DeForest. "And doctors, — they ought to change their terminology now and then. Everything is 'abnormal' or 'pathological.'"

"Very possibly. Will you go to see her, and talk some other terminology? Will you put her to sleep for once by stroking her forehead, as I have seen you do? Could you sleep for a night on the sofa? It's not a divan, mind you; it's one of those carpet abominations."

"If she likes me well enough to ask me."

"What do you say that for? You know she will."

She shook her head.

"I expect people to like me because I really can't see why they shouldn't, but there is always room for exceptions."

"Well, she will not be the exception. She will tell you her whole family history. There is a Bertha-with-Big-Feet in the kitchen, — some cousin or other. Ask her for anything you want. I shall charge them what I think they can afford to pay, and I will settle with you afterward."

She made a gesture of protest.

"No, please. I do not wish to be paid for such things."

Dr. Kent flicked the dust from his shoe with his handkerchief. It was not the first time that the question had been argued between them.

"You are too proud."

"If I were a trained nurse, or a trained anything," began Shirley DeForest in some distress, "or if I had my family to think of, I would sell my services for what they would bring. But I am alone, I am not strong enough to work as other women do, and I am too poor

to give anything but a little time and sympathy. I cannot take money for that, David. I cannot, indeed. It costs me very little to live."

"And that little is sometimes wanting. Your taxes and insurance go on, and a pretty penny you pay to Sam Foscitt for keeping the terrace in order."

"His wife needs the money."

"I do not believe you cook yourself proper food."

"Quite wrong. I am no stranger to beefsteak."

"I don't like it," he persisted, stubbornly. "I don't like your living alone here. It is self-isolated, — and you show the effects of it, if you want to know it."

"As to that, I have just had a letter from a cousin of mine who wants to pay me a visit. Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes." He changed his position on the door-step as she came out again. Despite his freedom of speech, there was a certain shyness in his manner toward her, the same shyness which the gawky boy had felt toward the charming girl already in society. "You must learn to shake hands, David," she had admonished him on one occasion. "I walk up to you just as civil as you please, and all you do is to stand there staring at me. Put out your hand; do you think me a school-ma'am with a rod?"

David looked at her doggedly from under his bushy brows. "I'll kiss the hand that smites me," he declared, boldly, and Shirley had desisted. Nevertheless, David Kent had learned to shake hands, — and also other things.

Years after, when he had come home to practice, and the townspeople had been inclined to pat him on the head, Shirley had promptly called him in to attend

her father and mother. They had fought the losing fight together. One hard night he had carried her fainting from one room to another, and, as she had rallied, she had pressed her lips to his hand, saying: "Don?" Now, Lieutenant DeForest's name was Donald. David Kent had laid that away in the silent places of his life.

"Dear Cousin Shirley (the letter began):—It was so good of you to send me that long letter in answer to the one I wrote you when Cousin Louisa died. I have thought of you very often since, and lately I have wondered whether you would like to have me board with you for a few weeks this summer. My chief, Miss Gunn, positively refuses, after her trip abroad last fall, to take any vacation this summer, and that leaves me free to go away. I had intended to visit Hull House, and then study the condition of Bohemian women in the cigar factories, but they tell me I must loaf first, though really I am perfectly well. I have never stayed in a New England village like Waukomis, and I am sure it would give me a great deal of material, — that is, if you care to take in a cousin whom you have not set eyes on since she was a midget in pigtails, but who remembers you perfectly, and your fan with a tassel. The fan was gauze, I think. I know it had a wreath of roses on it, and was a joy forever.

"Please write me quite candidly whether you would feel like having me, and also what you would like me to pay. I am the easiest person to please, and I am sure you would not find me a dead weight on your hands.

"Most cordially your cousin,

"MARY DUNHAM."

"What does she mean by her 'chief,' and 'studying Bohemian women'?"

"She is doing settlement work on the East Side."

"Have her by all means, and let her pay her share of the beefsteaks."

Shirley's mouth took an obstinate curve, but she did not reply. Dr. Kent struck a match on his shoe.

"What do you think of Dale so far?" he asked, as if by an afterthought.

"I think he is earnest" ("and self-conscious," was her mental reservation). She had not yet made up her mind about Dale. Evidently he had ability, but his nature was not transparent, and she liked transparent natures like Don's.

"Will he do us good, or will Waukomis spoil him? We are so bourgeois here!"

"You and I are odd ones, David. We do not fit in. It is not cakes and ale we want, but delight. . . ."

"All the charm of all the Muses
Often flowering in a lonely word."

"We are not ripe enough for that in America," he replied. "Our words are not lonely; we slop over. That is what takes me in Dale. He does not."

"But why does he act on his guard?" thought Shirley. Was it merely a newcomer's discretion, or was it some lack of confidence in his antecedents? This last supposition she kept to herself.

"Not so much of the cloth about him as Seymour has."

"David, you are unfair," said Shirley, more sharply because of that mental reservation. "You have as many mannerisms as most doctors, and you are not at

all anxious to get rid of them. Because a man of another profession has his, it does not follow that he is any less a man."

Dr. Kent got into his buggy.

"I can believe in the man," he said. "I shall believe in the profession when I see a man work as hard, seven days in the week, to build up the souls of men as I do to build up their bodies."

She watched him drive over the bridge.

"Dear old Daddy Longlegs," she thought; "who ever thought he would turn out like that?"

"Proud, proud as Lucifer," said Dr. Kent to himself. "She knows how to be poor, and to make it seem the most graceful thing yet, but she does not know how to be anything but Miss DeForest of The Terrace."

CHAPTER FIVE

HE had one call to make outside of the village before going home. As he turned into the highway, a very sandy one in this district, a man some distance ahead of him climbed the hill. The man was not tall. He walked not as laborers do, sinking on his hips at each stride, but trudged through the thick dust at a steady pace, with back erect.

"That fellow doesn't sprint, but he gets over the ground," thought the doctor, and, as he recognized the figure, he touched his horse with the whip.

"Get in," said he. "You ought to have a horse if you are going to take turns on this road."

"It is not in the stipend," said Dale, taking off his hat to cool his forehead. "How did my predecessor manage when he had to make calls outside the town?"

"He stayed at home. Where have you been?"

"To the town farm. Can you speak Polish?"

"No."

"Or, by any chance, Russian?"

"Not a word of either."

"There is a Polander, as they call him, out there at the farm, who puzzles me. I should like to be able to ask him some questions in his own language."

"You mean that poor demented fellow? I have heard about him."

"Is he demented? That is the very point."

"Either that, or half-witted. He has been a charge on the town for weeks. He was discovered one day prowling in the woods below the Gorge, and his clothes were wet through, as if he had been in the water. That is the most that any one can find out. No one knows where he came from. He will not tell his name."

"I watched him this morning while the overseer spoke to him. He seems to be afraid to speak. What do you do when these people need an interpreter?"

"For the most part they have to do without interpretation. We are getting more of them all the time, but unless they get into the courts we let them alone."

"Any attempt made to get them into the churches?"

"The Catholic Church is expected to undertake that."

"And does it? Their church here is small."

"They do more than we. You are a city man, Dale. The immigration problem concerns us as much as a storm on the coast that sweeps away some one else's cottages. When our own are threatened, then we protest."

"I was not thinking of him as a problem," said Dale, thoughtfully. "I was thinking of him as a human being."

That night he wrote to a Polish priest in Britton. The reply came promptly.

"DEAR MR. DALE AND FRIEND:— I have received your letter gladly. It is as you say kind thing for to see the man, find out if he have cause for sadness, and also to help him in such way as God direct. The Pole is orphan in this country. He has few friend. No man

care for his soul. I could tell you much of this. I will come by the eleven o'clock train Thursday.

"Yours with respect,

"STANISLAUS ANNOWSKI.

"Rector of St. Mary's Polish Catholic Church, Britton.

"P. S. Excuse to me the English. I speak your language with perfectness, but I have not the agility in writing."

Dale met the train. As the tall, awkward form in clerical dress stepped off from the car, he offered his hand.

"Good morning, Father. You were very kind to come."

"I was glad to come," the priest answered.

"Called him 'Father,'" observed Sam Foskitt, from his seat on a box.

"He didn't look old enough to be his father," objected his companion.

"Don't be a coot. That was a priest, Had on one of those bib vests; didn't you see it?"

"It is rather more than a mile, and the road is hard," Dale was urging.

"I walk five miles a day in my own parish," replied Father Annowski. His complexion was poor, and he was not prepossessing, but Dale caught his brooding glance with speculation. It suggested a tragedy in his own life, and there was a tragedy. Some years before, he had sent for his sister, the last of his family. At Ellis Island the inspector, turning up her eyelids, had discovered trachoma, and she had been sent back by the same ship. Half-way across the At-

lantic she had thrown herself overboard in the night.

There was a tall wood-pile behind the straggling mass of buildings which made the town farm. Between it and a low shed, saw in hand, was the man they had come to see. The overseer stood near by. He shook hands with the minister, and thrust out a hand uncertainly and let it fall again, to greet the priest.

"If you can make him talk, you're welcome to try," said he. "He has not opened his mouth to me since he was brought here. John," he called very loudly, "some folks have come to see you."

The Pole looked up stolidly from under his low brows. A gleam of recognition showed in his eyes as they fell on Dale, but he made no sign, and went on with his work. The priest spoke to him for ten minutes; the saw wavered, continued. It was impossible to say whether he understood.

"Try him in Russian," suggested Dale.

"I have spoken in both Russian and Polish. I think he does not hear."

"He hears well enough," said the overseer; and stepping to the rear he called sharply: "John!"

The man turned around quickly, trembling all over.

"What do you fear?" asked Father Annowski in Polish. "Do not be afraid; no one wishes to hurt you. Tell your story. Come! You must speak!"

Tears rolled down the man's cheeks. Still shaking like a hunted animal, he murmured a few words in a tone too low to be heard.

"What? Once more . . . ah! He thinks he is in jail. He is afraid he will be punished for speaking. You are not in jail, my friend. Speak freely."

The Pole shook his head, incredulously. He did not know what he had done to be arrested. Name? Paul Enovitch. Family all dead. Thought he would try his fortune in America . . . heard it was a great, rich country. Landed very early . . . couldn't tell when, before the ground was green. A farmer took him away. When he was told to dig he did, but he could not understand all. The man shut him up in a loft for two days. He ran away. He was afraid. When he asked for bread, the boys set dogs on him. He took to the woods. Was hungry, very hungry. Fell in the river in the dark, and was cold. They found him there, and brought him to jail in a wagon. He could not understand. He was very unhappy. He did not know what he had done.

It required half an hour's reasoning to convince him that he was free. When at last he realized the fact, he laughed and cried, and poured out a torrent of Polish, on his knees before the priest.

"Do not thank me; thank him," said Father Anowski good-naturedly, nodding toward Dale, who had seated himself on a projecting edge of the wood-pile. Before Dale had time to comprehend this flank movement, Enovitch leaped over the log, threw himself at his feet, and, seizing his hand, bedewed it with plentiful tears. For the first time in his life Dale felt a man's lips on his hand, and he felt the recoil of a free-born American.

"Ask him if he has not cried enough now, Father, will you? Make it kind. Say that I am a minister in town, and want to be his friend."

Enovitch beamed when this speech was translated to him. His teeth were set so low in his jaw that they showed an expanse of gum above them.

"Friends," repeated Dale, firmly. Did he know what that word meant to the other? He was to learn.

"Fren's," said the Pole, grinning again.

"He does not seem very bright; but I do not consider him at all demented," said Father Annowski.

"Well, now, Johnny, that's more like it, ain't it?" exclaimed the overseer, slapping him kindly on the back. "I rather think I can get him a place to work, now. Mr. Baker wants a man for haying, but he wouldn't take him if he thought he was going to be crazy."

"That was a good morning's work. I hope you will have your reward," said Father Annowski, as they walked back to the minister's to luncheon.

"I do not want reward," Dale replied. "Piling up merit," indeed! How materialistic the Roman Church was! The priest strode along.

"Every man wants his reward," said he. "Some ask one thing, some another. What a pretty town this is. My people live in a factory district. There is no park near enough for the little children to walk to. Of what good is a park to the poor, when it costs five cents to get to it? So they sweat in their tenements."

"My people have the country around them, but they do not seem to care for it."

"They have their cabbages," said the priest, sentimentously.

Mrs. Purple, sitting in the front window and waving a fly-killer in her hand, saw the two men pass.

"Who's he got with him now?" she inquired. "Eh, Mr. Lowry, who's the minister got with him now?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," Mr. Lowry answered, mildly.

"You ought to looked sooner. I want to know where

he's going, to be passing every time I come to the window. It gives me the fidgets to see him."

"Don't look," suggested Mr. Lowry.

"Of course I want to know what's going on," said Mrs. Purple, rocking majestically back and forth. Every chair Mrs. Purple sat in creaked in protest.

A large woman was she, with a soft, unwholesome countenance seamed with fine wrinkles, small eyes, and a wide, insincere mouth showing two rows of glittering false teeth. Her hair had the peculiarly lifeless tint of a stove which has been blacked, but not polished. She wore a percale wrapper of faded green, belted by a strap. Around her neck, instead of a collar, was a black and white plaid necktie with tassels. The sight of her rocking back and forth filled Mr. Lowry with irritation such as no words could express. He was a patient-mannered widower. Neighbors had recommended Mrs. Purple to him as a respectable elderly woman who would "take him in and do for him." He had assented to their arrangements at the time, without caring what they were, and ever since he had felt that he was both taken in and done for. Mrs. Purple ordered him around as if it were her house, and he her boarder. She took possession of the sitting-room which had been his wife's. She read his letters, and interrupted his work. He was as unhappy and helpless as a child.

He now went back to his desk patiently, to add over his column of figures. He wished the door between him and the sitting-room were closed. In daring moments he had gone so far as to say to himself that he should really have to close that door.

Mrs. Purple saw him leave the house, rolling his

umbrella. It was a pleasant day, but he liked the support of it. He looked older than he was, for he was but little over sixty.

"Mr. Lowry fails some," thought Mrs. Purple, complacently. She often told her crony, Mrs. Branch, that she did not know what Mr. Lowry would do if she should be taken away. At the pathetic thought she sniffed, dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief, and thoroughly enjoyed herself.

A day or two later Dale encountered Deacon Branch on the Green. He stopped and cleared his throat.

"I hear you had a visitor the other day?"

"Yes."

"Is he — I heard he was a Roman Catholic?"

"Father Annowski is a Polish Catholic priest."

Dale moved back a step to avoid being taken by the lapel of his coat.

"You had him to dinner with you, I hear?"

Dale assented.

"Don't you think," said the deacon, "that that was overdoing a little? I'm a liberal-minded man myself, but there's some who aren't."

"Manikin!" thought Dale, without a change of countenance. Aloud he said:

"Mr. Branch, have you read the Gospels through lately?"

"I have read them a great many times, sir."

"But lately?" persisted Dale; "all through at a sitting, just as you would a novel? You will find them from beginning to end a protest against the spirit of conventionality. Good evening, sir."

"That wasn't any way to talk about Scripture," said Mrs. Branch, afterward. "Did he say it was a novel?"

"No, he didn't say that exactly; he said, read it as if it was." Mr. Branch was sorry he had brought his wife's criticisms about his ears, for he liked Dale.

"I saw it in his eye the first thing that he wasn't sound," said Mrs. Branch, triumphantly. "If there had been a man on that committee, — but you never have any judgment. Just because Dr. Kent wrote about him. Dr. Kent is next door to an infidel himself. If that's higher criticism, I've had enough of it. Last Sunday it was all about 'being descended from lower forms of life,' 'amoebas,' he called it, and cuttlefish."

"Jellyfish, Maria."

"Well, jellyfish. It's the *principle* I'm talking about."

"You haven't got it right. It was 'ascended,' not 'descended.' It was all reasoned out in Drummond, but you wouldn't understand it. 'We are ascended,' says he, 'from lower forms of life.'"

"You may be, but I'm not," she retorted.

When Dale, later, was asked if it was true that he had ever said that Higher Criticism regarded the Gospels as a novel, to be compared with other works of fiction, he colored high, and drew a long breath as if he needed it.

"I need a tonic," said he. "I must go to see Billy."

CHAPTER SIX

THE trouble with Billy is, he's scatter-brained."
"Now, Nathan, remember that chicken-coop,"
said Mrs. Lemmon.

"You're always bringing that up, seems to me,"
said Mr. Lemmon, but there was no shame in his face.
He liked to hear his wife talk. She was his theater.

"But I have not heard the chicken-coop story,"
said Dale, taking the sofa in delighted anticipation.
("Just like the good little boy I went to school with,
who never did anything himself, but always egged on
the rest of us because he liked to see things lively,"
said Mr. Lemmon.)

Mrs. Lemmon was an alto presence, fair-haired and
equable. Her voice flowed richly, like honey from the
comb.

"Billy is absent-minded, like his father," she began.
"Mr. Lemmon was making a chicken-house this spring,
and got so worried thinking about Billy's absent-
mindedness that he nailed the front of the house on
from the inside, and when we came home there he was,
pounding away with the flat of his hands to be let out,
and calling 'Ma-a!' like a sick sheep.

"'Nathan,' said I, with my mouth to the wall,
'why didn't you pry off a board?'

"'Went the wrong way; couldn't get any purchase,'
said he. 'When you get through laughing, maybe

you'll do something. I've been hollering here, 'most all the afternoon.'"

"How did you get out?" asked Dale, in an ecstasy of mirth.

"She knocked in a couple of boards so I could squeeze out. 'Twas kind o' funny when you come to think of it," admitted Mr. Lemmon, mildly. "Henrietta, hadn't you better go up to see if Billy is ready?"

"No, Nathan, boys don't like to be watched. If he has had any mishap he will have to be ingenious enough to find a way out of it himself."

"I think he is coming now," said Dale.

Billy had been trying to make his stiff drab hair lie sleek like the minister's. His milk-white teeth made his mouth look too full, and he curled his lips over them as often as he remembered it. He had square shoulders, far-away blue eyes, and no more freckles than are tolerable in a blue-eyed, sandy-haired boy of thirteen.

"Now, don't stay until the last dog is hung," admonished his father.

"We will see to that," said Dale. "Would you like to drive, Billy?"

"Why — can I?"

"The favor will be on my side. Mr. Branch assured me that his horse was gentle. I have not tried pulling her tail, because I was uncertain what effect it would have."

"Pa, he's got Reubena!"

"Is that her name? Perhaps if I had addressed her as 'Reubeena,' she would have shown a trifle more speed?"

"No, sir, she wouldn't. She's the meanest horse in Waukomis."

"What is the matter with her? Cannot she go?"

"Yes, she can go. Pa —"

"Does she shy?"

"No, she don't shy, she's just mean, that's all. Pa says —"

"Billy!" interrupted Mr. Lemmon, hastily.

Billy jumped into the buggy. Dale was about to climb in over the wheel, when Mrs. Lemmon stepped forward.

"Billy! Compendium, Rule 27."

"What?"

"Turn the wheel out so the other person can get in."

"I forgot," said Billy, making a wide turn.

"Take care, take care, you'll be over on the other side of the road," said his father, anxiously. As they drove off smartly, he gave a sigh of relief.

"Billy can drive well enough when he keeps his mind on it."

"No one can drive Reubena; she does the driving," answered his wife. "Should you think Deacon Branch would try to work that old horse off on Mr. Dale?"

"I suppose he thought he wouldn't see the difference."

"Pooh! he sees everything."

"I've noticed one thing about Mr. Dale. He likes to get other people to tell things, but he doesn't tell anything about himself. Have you noticed it?"

"I had not thought of it."

"No, you were doing the talking," said Mr. Lemmon, slyly.

"Where shall we go, Billy?"

"Did you ever ride on the ridge road?"

"No. Is it pleasant?"

"Yes, sir. There's a — You can see off a good way."

"Then let us take that road."

The lane was lined with choke-cherries, and festooned with grape-vines and clematis. Spires of pink hardhack, deflecting from the perpendicular with dainty caprice, rose along the wayside; rudbeckia flaunted in the grass. Everywhere was the July smell, which is as different from April's delicate earthy scent as it is from the winy odor of October. The mealiness of chestnut bloom was in it, the rankness of bitter yarrow, the spice of sweet-fern, steeped in the sun.

Billy drove conscientiously, never turning his head except to point out some object of interest, when he nodded to right or left as well as he could, while keeping one eye on the horse.

"Reubena jogs along well, so far," observed the minister.

"She'd better," said Billy, shortly.

All at once Reubena threw her tail over the lines, and, looking over her shoulder, showed the whites of her eyes and her teeth in a grin of malicious contempt.

"There! she's begun," exclaimed Billy. Leaning forward, he gave the reins a quick pull around the dashboard. With a jerk of her long neck Reubena started across the road in a series of tacking and wearing, backing and filling evolutions, breaking at last into the gallop of a hippopotamus gone mad. The harness rattled. Billy, crimson with mortification, set his jaw and pulled. The minister was calm.

"Is anything stinging her?" he inquired, as she came

to a standstill, and attempted to paw at her left fore-foot with the other three feet at once.

"That fly don't hurt; her hide's too thick," said Billy, scornfully, flicking it off. "I hate a sorrel horse. She don't want to go, that's all. She's pulling at the bit now, and holding back with her feet. See that streak on her side. Anybody'd think we had been driving her hard. Pa says any —"

"Well?"

"He says any horse will turn out a crank if he has a crank to drive him."

Dale shook. There was something in his decorous mirth which either irritated or exhilarated the hearer, Billy could not decide which.

"You laugh a great deal, don't you?" he asked.

"I have to," answered Dale.

They were on the ridge now, in full view of what Billy had brought them there to see. On the west side of the valley rose a hill whose rounded top looked emerald between the wooded heights on either hand. Standing by itself in a field, its magnificent bulk reared against the sky, was a stately walnut-tree. Lieutenant DeForest had once compared it to a ship at full sail, and Billy had never forgotten it. It was a mystery, an enchantment. He could not tell the minister about it, but he had brought him there to discover it for himself; it was the best he had to give.

"It's fine over there," he said, shyly.

"Glorious! Why, we can see the whole range from here. That is Wolf Mountain, isn't it, and Sentinel Hill?"

"Yes, sir." (There — there — over there!)

"And that one with the pine-trees running up to a peak — is that The Torch?"

"Yes, sir," said Billy, with a lump in his throat. The minister had not noticed the tree.

"This is an excellent place for us to have lunch. Will you hitch our friend Reubena?"

"She don't stand very well," said Billy, doubtfully.

"If she wants to sit down she may. I have seen women, Billy, who resembled our friend Reubena."

"Perhaps they belonged to a crank," Billy suggested.

"Perhaps they did," said Dale. "Here we are. I told Joanna to put my lunch up without safety pins. I dislike to have my lunch pinned up with safety pins. Do you?"

"Depends upon what's inside," said Billy.

"There are sandwiches inside, and cookies," said Dale, investigating. He took out a bottle. "Which would you rather have, Billy, phosphate or cold tea?"

Billy deliberated.

"Cold tea."

"Ah, now!" Dale expostulated.

"I thought it would be what you'd have."

"Hah! It isn't, it's raspberry phosphate; do you like it? When I was a little fellow some one gave me five cents once for soda-water. I wanted raspberry, but she thought a glass of milk would do me more good, and I felt hurried, so I said I would take milk just because I wanted the raspberry. Can you understand that? I can't. I have had a good many glasses of soda since, but whenever I remember that glass that I never had, it makes me thirsty. Have some more; and now, Billy, I want to ask you a question. Why did your mother

say something about a compendium and rules as we came away?"

"Oh, that's one of her ways to make me remember. You see, I'm always forgetting something, and getting mixed up. She says it's easier to do a thing because it's the rule, than because somebody else tells you to. She makes believe they're in a book. She calls it the Universal Compendium."

"I see. You happened to get an uncommonly nice stepmother, Billy."

"It didn't happen. I picked her out myself."

"That is very interesting. Tell me about it."

"Why, Pa and I went to visit Uncle Dan, three years ago, and she was boarding there all summer. She taught school. I'd like to have been in her school. The day we came home I told her I wished she would marry Pa and me, and come to live at our house. She laughed. Did you ever hear her laugh? She asked me if my father had told me to say that. I said no, I guessed he hadn't thought of it; I'd only just thought of it myself, and I always thought of things first. She said it was very kind of me. She said it kind of funny."

"I hoped she'd say something to Pa about it, but she didn't, and we were half way home before I remembered to tell him."

"Pa said: 'Billy!' "

"I said: 'Say, Pa, wouldn't it be just splendid if she lived with us all the time?'

"Pa said: 'Billy!' again, like that, and stopped right in the middle of the road. He asked me every single thing I'd said, and thought, and thought, and then he said:

" 'You little rascal, why didn't you tell me that before? ' "

" I said: ' Pa, let's turn around and go back! ' "

" And did you? " asked Dale.

" Nope — sir," said Billy; " the horse did it. He got way up on the bank before we knew what he was about. We thought we were going to lose a wheel off the buggy. When we got him down he was headed the other way. Pa said that settled it. We drove back pretty quick. Pa said the horse seemed to want to go. I didn't speak but once all the way. I thought I'd better not, every time I looked at Pa.

" We found her alone. The rest had gone over to get the mail. She asked Pa if he had forgotten anything, and he said, no, ma'am, he'd recollected something. He made me stay outside. I walked around the yard, and around the yard, and first I knew, I ran into the clothes-line. It was a wire one, and somebody had let it down, and hadn't pulled it up again, and so it sagged, and so it took me right across the neck. I suppose it pitched me over; I don't remember.

" She had her arms right around me, and she was crying, and calling me ' dear boy.' She likes me; she does, honest; she liked me right off. Pa thought I was dead, but I wasn't, and I sung out: ' Say, *won't* you marry us? We think you're just the nicest! ' and she said she didn't know but she'd have to, and — that's all." Billy, who had been betrayed into a shy boy's loquacity, ran down abruptly.

The minister was smiling. He looked roused and happy.

" There's one thing I get mixed up about," Billy resumed. " I can't make out whose side she's on.

She takes my part, and she takes Pa's part. She takes your part, too."

"No one could desire a better champion."

"Mrs. Branch said once you looked slick, like her black kitten after the old cat had licked it down. Ma said you'd got your eyes open, anyway."

"I am very much obliged to your mother," said Dale. Then he stretched himself on the grass, and began to talk. Was it that day or some day after that that Billy first came to think of the Church of God as a growing thing like the Tree, with its roots in the universal, and its top in the sky? It was a vision splendid. It fired him with enthusiasm. It tugged at the instinct of cooperation which is at the heart of a boy. If the minister had only gone on, if he had called to Billy to get up and fight for the vision, he need have called but once.

But the minister was young. He was so young that he had forgotten that boys are like that. He had dabbled in psychologies until he had lost confidence in his own perceptions. Boys were bundles of atavistic traits. Their higher nature, if it existed at all at that age, which was doubtful, must be cautiously studied, ambushed, and captured. It made no difference that he did not recognize himself in the descriptions, for as often as he read the boy-study dicta he was convinced that he had not been a normal boy.

"I mustn't scare him off or bore him," he reflected, and so he drew his hat over his eyes, and Billy, freed from the necessity of deportment, relaxed too. He was quite stiff at the diaphragm from the strain of Keeping It Up. He could look hard at the minister now, at his sober tweeds, his cuffs with their small link buttons,

at the exposed cheek, like the ruddy side of a pear. He thought he would be a minister when he grew up; and he would not forget the gold buttons.

The hat dropped, and the minister looked up at him. He was taken by surprise. This was not stiffness at the diaphragm, it was a tingle. Tingles were pleasanter.

"You've been asleep, I guess," he said, shyly.

"No, I have been working up my sermon."

"I didn't know that was the way sermons were done."

"It is the way I do mine. It is hard work, too. I want you to know that, Billy. Writing sermons is work."

Alas for being a minister! Billy could never write a sermon lying on his back. Must the dream go?

As they got into the buggy both heads turned to look back. The Tree was sailing, sailing. If the minister had only seen!

Ah, Billy, the secrets we do not share have most to do with the molding of us!

"What made you take him up on that hot road?" asked Mr. Lemmon.

"Oh — nothing," answered Billy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MR. LOWRY walked down town across the Green. The grass had been cut by the horse-mower that morning, and the juicy, acrid smell of the moist heaps pervaded the air. He noticed it in passing. He cast about in his mind for a word to describe it. Mr. Lowry had been feeling for words all his life, and never finding them.

Four or five teams were hitched to the posts at the lower end of the Green. In one of these a little maid of six had been left for the moment. She held her rag doll tightly in one arm, and looked out apprehensively upon a new, unaccustomed world.

"That is a very fine dolly you have," said Mr. Lowry very kindly; "what is its name?"

The little girl stared at him, round-eyed, without response, after the manner of some children; and he went on his way, the smile fading. Some nerve in him throbbed with an old hurt.

The steps of the Town Hall were worn dingy with the tread of many feet, the pretentious red brick façade was dingy, and the staircase had a stale suggestion of unfaithful scrubbing-brushes that never scrubbed their way down to the last week's layer of soap. At the head of the stairs a long hall, carpeted with cocoanut matting, led to the rear of the building. The last door on the left bore a small tin sign, much defaced:

TOWN CLERK

The room boasted two windows, and a second door in its end wall. Before removing his hat, Mr. Lowry selected a key from the bunch in his pocket, unlocked the door, and looked within to see that the rows of volumes on the open shelves were safe. They gave out a musty odor of leather and old paper. It was to him as the breath of the ocean to seafaring men.

He hung up his hat. A black alpaca coat dangled from a peg beside it. Some inanimate objects seem to have acquired the faculty of mimicry. This coat had caught the crook of his right elbow, and the outward curve of his back just below the neck. He looked very tall and spare in his shirt-sleeves, as he slowly drew off his street coat. Reaching for the other he slipped it on, and lo, it was as if a cicada had gone back into its cast-off shell.

He drew some pieces of cracker from his pocket, and, stooping, strewed crumbs meagerly from a certain corner of the base-board, across the desert of the floor to the oasis of his desk, where he dropped a large bit by his chair, within easy reach of his hand. He then brought a folio from the inner room, and opened it on the desk, — but not to work. He had made the discovery that his pen tray needed tidying, and busied himself cleaning it out, rubbing a blot of ink from a penholder, and collecting his scattered rubber bands into a box which he took from one of the drawers. All these employments took time.

A stranger had called at the office that morning in search of a Revolutionary ancestor. The records were

silent, and after hesitation he had brought out his own note-books from his safe. When she pushed her chair back angrily, and got up in haste, he knew better than to look higher than her chin as he asked her if she had found anything to help her in her search.

"No," she answered, shortly, though her face was crimson; "there is nothing there about my family. It must have been some other Peet!"

"Probably," said Mr. Lowry, bowing her out of the room, his puckered face blank of expression.

Now, with hands behind his head, he recalled again the story of Ashbel Peet, the Tory of Peet Hollow, who had been shot dead in a raid on a neighbor's barn, and chuckled in ironical mirth.

"That's the way with them all," he ejaculated. "If their ancestors don't turn out to have been a credit to the family, why — 'it must have been some other Peet!'"

Presently a little mouse with a sleek coat of pinkish grey stole out into the quiet room, and began to nibble at the feast which Providence had put in her way. Mr. Lowry's spectacles slipped down on his nose as he watched. She crept toward the big bit. He reached his hand down, cautiously. Instantly the little creature sprang back, and regarded him with beseeching look, her tiny paws held up to her palpitating breast. He withdrew his hand, disappointed. She was creeping back stealthily when the sound of footsteps outside the door sent her scampering to her hole. Gordon Dale entered.

"Come in, come in," said Mr. Lowry without surprise. There was a sparkle of anticipation in his sunken blue eyes as he beckoned to a chair. Dale closed the

door ere he seated himself, and leaned forward with folded arms on the desk.

"It is about that young woman, Myrtie Cole," he began. "Do you happen to remember her family, — what sort of people they were? She interests me very much, and I could help her better if I understood just what she has to contend with."

"Well, I can show you that," Mr. Lowry answered, and taking some volumes from the other table he disappeared in the inner room. Dale followed, but paused in amazement on the threshold.

"What! You keep these records on open shelves? Haven't you a vault?"

"You see," replied the town clerk with a wave of his hand around the bare closet, for it was nothing more.

"Not even steel cases for these oldest records? Are they complete?"

"As complete as any in the State." His parchment cheek had a faint color, for this was his sensitive spot.

"The town ought to be stirred up to take better measures for their protection."

"The town doesn't care a damn," said Mr. Lowry, deliberately. The word meant that he was giving himself the luxury of thinking aloud. "Western bonds, and the tobacco crop, and who's going to get the post-office next administration, — that's all Waukomis cares for."

"Cannot you use your influence?" urged Dale.

Mr. Lowry laughed, a soundless laugh that puckered the skin around his eyes into innumerable wrinkles.

"Me? I haven't any influence. There," laying an open volume down to show a couple of entries, too near

together, in his own handwriting; the dates were twenty-three years back. As Dale's eye fell on them he bit his lip.

"Too bad," he murmured.

"Go back another generation, and you will find the same thing. They go crooked while they are soft wood. That little boy of hers will show his blood before another twenty years is over."

"Naturally, if that is what is expected of him."

"He will, anyway. I don't say that a different bringing-up from the start might not have made some difference, but when you are as old as I am and have seen as much family history, you will agree that the forces that made them what they are began before they did. There is another family down on the Plain that has no staying power. The children are as likely a set as you would wish to see; but they get a setback in one way or another before they are thirty, and never amount to anything afterward. It has been the same way for three or four generations."

"That lays stress enough upon heredity and environment, but very little upon the individual will; and the fourth factor, which is unceasingly at work, it ignores altogether."

"What factor?"

"God."

"Well, maybe," said Mr. Lowry, "maybe; but I've noticed that the Lord is generally on the side of the decent grandfather!"

"And on the side of the decent grandson, too," Dale answered. "Suppose we were to try to help Him make it up to the little boy for the want of a decent grandfather? Suppose our whole church pulled to-

gether in such ways as that? You would not refuse your help, would you?"

Mr. Lowry looked abashed.

"I do not see how I can be of any use to that young woman."

"Simply do not create an atmosphere against her. Don't doom them beforehand. Give God a fighting chance. You don't mind my dropping in for information like this, do you?"

"Bless you, no, I like it," said Mr. Lowry. The other's warm clasp lingered. It was so long since his own hand had been warm. Ah, it was superb to be young and confident. Not to live in a waking dream, but to dream that one's dreams would come true. They would hoard their sensations as a miser his gold if they but knew. But they never knew in time. There was a great gulf fixed.

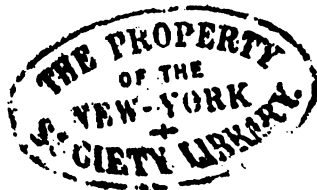
But Dale was not feeling young or confident as he went away. What was the matter with his people? Provincial? Commonplace? But if there were the least inspiration in a man's heart he might murder his English and eat with his knife, but he would not be commonplace. It was not that their lives were limited, their views narrow; but that they were self-satisfied. The very houses showed a smug self-content. Manners were not simple; unavowed motives were at work; and underneath the surface he had already caught glimpses of a profound selfishness. Yet this church had a history. He recalled the last "offering" for missions, and winced. Did they realize, these people, that God was here, in their midst? Did he realize it himself? And if he did, and he hoped that he did, how was he to make it more real to them? So

easy to work for a new institution, so hard to touch men's spirits to finer issues. It would be slow, terribly slow. A man would have to give much. He would have to pay the full price. Did he care enough to pay the price? Personally, with a few exceptions, they bored him.

He glanced up at The Terrace in passing. The doors stood open throughout, showing a vista of flowery spaces beyond, as through a tunnel. Pink cushions were piled in the porch. It was surprising to see what a difference the note of color made. The house seemed to have awaked from sleep. For a moment he seemed to see a figure in white, with a long feather in her hat, tripping down the steps, and looked again; but there was no one there.

By this time he had worked his way through his pastoral calls. When they were all made he felt a vague disappointment. Not here was he to find that lady of his dreams. He had seen them all now, young maids and old. They belonged to the Endeavor Society, the Young Ladies' Mission Circle, the Literary Club. They sat in rocking chairs and rocked until his eyes were dizzy. They made much of him, but their eyes had wandered to every passing team, and there had been a great deal of talk but no conversation. It had happened otherwise with Miss DeForest.

A fold of her black dress escaping from the steamer chair, which stood with its back to him at the far end of the lawn, showed him where to find her. She did not turn her head at his approach, and as he drew nearer he saw that she was asleep. Her book had slipped to the ground; it was Silvio Pellico's "My Prisons." A humming-bird darted in and out of the flowers in her



lap. The air was spicy with the scents of pinks and warm grass. He told himself that he ought to go — for a sleeping face tells too many tales — and yet lingered. So lonely and so unguarded, the little grey lady! Not middle-aged, yet old before her time. She must have been a beautiful girl. He walked softly away.

He had nearly reached the corner of the house when he heard her speak, and turned. Miss DeForest was looking at him over the back of her chair.

"I beg pardon," he said, a little confused. "I thought you were asleep. I am afraid that I disturbed you. I will come another time."

"No, now, please;" she was smiling, and holding out her hand. "I was asleep, I think. I am glad to see you."

This was the Miss DeForest he had met before, friendly and a trifle indifferent. They talked of Silvio Pellico, of the effect of different perfumes upon one's moods, of the visit she was expecting from her cousin Miss Dunham — careless talk, but the man who was already beginning to feel his cage drank it in.

She strolled across the grass with him as he took his leave. A branch of a climbing rose had blown down, and she bade him hold it for her.

"It will shade the window too much in the future," he observed.

"I dare say, but I do not live in the future," she answered in a tone which made no bid for sympathy. He had not quite liked the tone. He would have preferred — not a bid for sympathy, exactly — but, let us say, a disposition to meet it half-way.

The sight of her house had recalled that afternoon.

He was turning his impressions over in his mind, and his thoughts about his people, when he came in sight of Sweetwater Station, a little box set down in the midst of a field. At present the box was tenanted. A tall girl in a navy blue skirt and white linen waist stood on the platform, holding her traveling bag and coat, and looked around her in an undecided way. He had just time to note that she was young and held herself well when her eyes fell on him. She stepped forward immediately, with the evident intention of speaking to him. Dale stopped, lifted his hat, and waited. The girl surveyed him through cool hazel eyes which looked down at him slightly.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“GOOD afternoon,” she began, in the exact tone to intimate that she was addressing him as a human being, and not as a young and attractive man; “will you kindly tell me just how far it is to Waukomis?”

“It is two miles and a quarter.”

“Thank you; and the distance to the Gorge, please? I have already asked others; but they do not tell you how many turns to make. They ask you if you know where some one’s barn is.”

“There is no barn on that road, to serve as a landmark,” said Dale, gravely. “It is a straight path for half a mile through the woods.”

“Thank you,” she said again. “If one must walk one prefers to know whether the distance is two miles or five.” She unfolded a leaf of her confidence discreetly. “The conductor told me that I should have time to walk to the Gorge and back before the later train, but now that I have let my trunk go on without me, the station-master tells me that both the later trains are express, and do not stop.”

“The conductor may have meant the milk train. That stops at every station, but it is not run for the convenience of travelers.”

“Oh, I should not mind that. I could stand beside the milk cans. It would be a novel experience.”

“Oh, there is a lone car on the end, as it happens.

A battered, dusty car, but it serves. I was on my way to the Gorge, and mean to return by that train, if you will accept my guidance? "

"Perhaps that will be best," she replied, with no demur, "if you will wait a moment for me to send a telegram? "

The station-master had reappeared, and knelt to fondle a box with anxious care. She stopped, and asked him a question. Her voice was not shrill; it was merely raised in calm inquiry.

"Why did you not tell me that the milk train would answer my purpose? "

The station-master shoved and patted the box into the place where he wished it to stand, then rose, and dusted his hands on his trousers.

"You didn't ask me about no milk train. You asked me if there was a passenger train that stopped here, and I told you there wa'n't."

Dale overheard, and she saw it as she rejoined him.

"The way of the native," said he, lightly. "If you had thrown yourself entirely on his mercy, he would have told you all about the trains, and also about the crops."

"I see; it was quite my own fault," she answered. "I asked him a limited question, and he gave me a limited answer. Don't you think it is interesting to see how people's minds work? "

"Very," he replied, with conviction. He admired her long, easy gait; her mannish shoes made neat prints in the damp road.

"I do not know but I am stealing some one's thunder by bringing you here for the first time."

"Why? "

"This is our show place, and we make up parties to show it to every visitor."

"Oh, I shall enjoy it just as much a second time. I always try to take the earliest opportunity of doing anything. Once a friend of mine was in Rome when a party of people made an excursion to Lake Nemi. She gave up going; she thought she would have plenty of other chances. Well, she has been in Rome three times, and never yet has she seen Nemi. Something has always happened."

"She is like the peasant who had never seen Carcassonne. The only imaginary consolation for that loss is that Carcassonne seen too often might, who knows? bore one."

She shook her head with bright decision.

"I am never bored," she said. "It always seems to me that it argues a superficial disposition to be easily bored. Why should we demand that the same set of faculties be perennially gratified? If we are not entertained in one way we can be in another. There is always the human interest."

"That everywhere, as you say, even in a village; but perhaps you do not pitch your tent in a village?" Artful Dale! He had learned that, at any given moment of a conversation, there are always two, the one who manages the talk, and the one who talks.

"No, I am doing settlement work in New York."

"Then I think you must be the cousin Miss DeForest is expecting. May I introduce myself? Gordon Dale."

She smiled for the first time, a pleasant smile showing square white teeth, set a trifle apart.

"I am Miss Dunham, yes, and I am glad to meet one

who knows my cousin. It is so good of her to have me here, when we have not seen each other for years. I remember her very well, though. I was a gawky school-girl then, and she was a vision, all in clouds of pink, like a fairy. I am anxious to see what she will be like now."

"You will find her changed," he said, involuntarily.

"Presumably, after all this time, but I am sure she is charming, from her letters. Anywhere in the thirties is an interesting age for a woman, but not so much as the forties. The forties are perfectly fascinating! In what way do you mean that she is changed?"

"She has had a great deal of trouble, you know."

"Ah, yes," said the girl, "but grief is such a spur! It stings one on to achievement. Oh, I did not realize that we were so close to the Gorge!"

"The earth is slippery here. You had better take my hand."

"Thank you," she said, accepting it without self-consciousness. "It *is* beautiful! What rocks are those opposite?"

"I do not know. I am no geologist."

"And are those the falls where the Indians used to fish for lamprey eels?"

"I see you have heard our traditions. Their chief-tain's grave is on top of that hill. The tribe piled a cairn of stones over it, but a New York family built a summer home up there—you see it through the woods?—and used the stones to build their power-house."

"Vandals!" she exclaimed.

"The power-house is in a 'sightly' place, as they

say here," said Dale, pleased by her enthusiasm, which, however, created in him a desire to play with it.

"Are you an iconoclast too?" she demanded.

"I hope not. A cairn of stones is not exactly an icon, however."

"You know what I mean; it is the idea, the poetry, the link with the past. It is a stupid materialism that would destroy such things."

"I agree with you there, but they were not so much at fault as you suppose, for no one told them what the pile of stones was."

"Then the town ought to have been ashamed of itself," she replied, and they were holding a lively discussion upon the tendencies of the times when he drew out his watch and exclaimed in dismay.

"I ought to beg your pardon, but if we mean to catch that train we have only six minutes."

"Must we run?"

"No, only walk fast;" but while they were still in the road the train whistled, and his companion broke away from him. She ran like Atalanta. He followed doggedly; he hated to run.

The rickety car already held three occupants, a man and woman of middle age, and a girl of twenty. The elder lady opened and closed her eyes, wearily, at their entrance; the man gave them both the quick, appraising glance of one accustomed to scan faces. His own countenance was square-jawed and florid, with a nose that was large at the tip. His thick hair was slightly grizzled, and his lower lip protruded a little, though in a good-natured way. Behind him, leaning on the back of his seat, sat the younger lady, wrapped in a voluminous dust-cloak of tan-colored

pongee. A brown veil draped around her hat dipped and floated with every movement, but could not hide an exquisite complexion of the rarest pink and white.

"What are they stopping for now?" inquired a despairing voice from the seat in front, as the train came to a standstill below Waukomis station.

"Poor Mamma!" exclaimed the girl, with a little laugh which reached the two behind her; "only the milk cans — thirty-eight, thirty-nine. It was that half hour at Plainfield Junction that finished you! What do you suppose Duclos will do, Papa, left behind in that benighted spot?"

"Don't know," was the answer. "It's his business to get himself out of such fixes; that's what I pay a shawfer for."

"There was just one little chicken-bone left in the basket," said the girl in a joyous undertone. "Here we are at last, Mamma."

"Miss DeForest is there on the platform," said Dale to Miss Dunham. She looked out and smothered a little sound in her throat. It was true, Cousin Shirley had changed! She said nothing, and Dale was glad. He never looked long at Miss DeForest. Not that her face was not sweet to see, but somehow the face of the photograph came between him and the real face, and blurred them both.

Before they could reach the car door, the girl in the pongee cloak had darted through it and down the steps up to the little figure in black, grasping her by both hands effusively.

"Miss DeForest! Did you come down to meet me?"

"No, I did not know you were coming to-day, Miss

Gilmore," Shirley answered, rather coolly. "I expect a cousin by this train; there she is now."

Ruth Gilmore reluctantly let her hands go.

"Of course. It was very stupid of me," she murmured, her cheeks suffused, "but for a moment I really thought you had come to meet me."

While Dale was hunting an expressman, she crossed the waiting-room to speak to the others. She swayed forward at the shoulders as she walked, with the angular grace of a lily on a long, slender stem. Her features, like her father's, were crude; her hair, a sunny light brown. Her manner, when she spoke, had an odd, piquant suggestion in it of an extremely sophisticated school-girl.

"Our touring-car broke down on the road, and we had to cut across lots to the milk train instead of tooting up Main Street in style,—just think how exasperating! Mamma has a fearful headache from wounded vanity. Do you like to mote, Miss Dunham?"

"I know very little about such delights," said May Dunham, smiling.

"Will you go with me some day? I can manage the go-cart alone."

"Come down to see May," said Shirley. "Thank you, Mr. Dale. Miss Gilmore, may I introduce our minister, Mr. Dale?"

"He seems a nice, chubby little man; I hope he is not of the curate type?" thought May, but put an interrogation mark after the reflection. She had an honest mind; she was open to fresh information.

"You are not in the least like the last incumbent," remarked Ruth Gilmore, looking at Dale with small but mischievous blue eyes. "Can you preach sermons

that will keep a frivolous person's mind from wandering?"

He made a slight bow.

"I can, yes."

"I will tell my mother that," said Ruth Gilmore. "Her intentions are good, but she is so fearfully young! Don't ask me to take a class in Sunday school, though. I did it once, and my boys got off on snakes. They said black snakes were poisonous, and I told them to look it up. Next Sunday, just as the bell rang for silence, one of them piped up: 'Miss Gilmore? Say, Miss Gilmore, what snake shall we look up for next Sunday?' Don't ask me to repeat the experience!"

Dale laughed.

"Certainly not," he answered, promptly. "I should not think of allowing you to take a class in my Sunday school."

Ruth bridled, but May looked on in calm approval.

"Not the curate type," she decided.

A runabout had approached the station. The man in charge of it came forward, and touched his hat.

"All ready, Miss Gilmore."

"Come, Mamma," said Ruth. Stepping in after her mother, she turned the handle, and the automobile sped up the street in a cloud of dust. The two cousins walked up the steep hill, and turned south toward The Terrace just as a buggy came down the street.

"Dr. Kent is driving two horses; he has been out of town," was Shirley's comment. She held up her hand, it must be confessed, a little like a princess commanding a subject; but Dr. Kent had already pulled in his horses and leaned forward. Curled up in his left arm his little boy lay, fast asleep.

"She bought an egg-beater," said Shirley.

"Good!" said Dr. Kent.

"And a soap-saver, and ever so many other little things. Her husband gave her a dollar and a quarter; and it did her a world of good to buy them. She said she did not mind contriving, if she only had anything to contrive with!"

"You are a marvel, if you got a dollar and a quarter out of that man," said Dr. Kent. "Welcome to Waukomis, Miss Dunham. Mrs. Kent will call on you soon, and let me say that I am glad on Miss De-Forest's account that you have come. Two beans are better than one in that big shell of hers."

"Your doctor is quite young," May remarked.

"Oh, David never was young. Mamma used to say that he was born two thousand years old," said Shirley.

"And about the egg-beater? I did not understand." Shirley explained.

"How interesting!" May explained.

"She is fascinating still, but she is very much changed," she thought, as she brushed her hair for tea. "It must be narrowing to one to live so out of the current. I wish I could do something for her while I am here. Perhaps I have a mission here, after all. I should like to think that my summer would count for something."

The telephone bell rang that evening, and she answered it.

"Are you all right?" came over the wire.

"Who is it, please?"

"Dr. Kent. Are you all right?"

"Does he call you up that way often?" she asked her cousin.

“Every night,” answered Shirley, warmly but carelessly, for we grow so used to our guardian angels!

“How perfectly delightful!” said May.

CHAPTER NINE

“**Y**OU can’t think how nice it is to handle china that *is* china,” said May, piling one plate on top of another, with the confident touch of a girl who has had a course in household economics.

“We dine off one of Macy’s \$6.98 sets at the House; hardware, my chief calls it. She is not practical, you know. She never had known what limitation meant until she went into the work, and she used to say that neighborhood housekeeping would be simply perfect if it were not for the housekeeping. I wish we had this kitchen!”

“It will look better with a new floor,” said Shirley. “I have money enough for half of it. Did you ever hear of the teacher who had saved enough to take her half-way across the Atlantic Ocean, but who never could scrape together enough to get her the rest of the way?”

Waukomis considered Shirley’s levity over her small means to be in bad form.

“I was thinking of our cockroaches and water-bugs. We whitewashed and fumigated, and still they would platoon in from the next house, presumably. The chief called them the Hearthstone Club. She used to pull off her low shoes, and go for them at arm’s length,—that was before we found out what kind of insect powder was deadly enough. Now, whenever we hear a hop-hopping downstairs, with poundings on the walls,

Miss Wilkinson puts her head in at my door and says: 'Hist! "There was a sound of revelry by night,"' and then we go down to kill water-bugs."

"Is she the other one of you?"

"Yes, she's lank, and has a Roman nose, and always goes about in a rain coat and soft felt hat. She has a leaning toward the Salvation Army, while the chief is an agnostic; so we have plenty of variety in our views. Of course we practise absolute toleration in all such matters," she added, rather loftily. "I wish you could meet the chief. She is very brilliant — and then, she has such high ideals! She has had a very unhappy experience. I don't know what, for we never discuss our private affairs, but she said to me once: 'I have gained my power through suffering. I could not spare a single pang of what I have endured.' Don't you think that was noble?" She had not been these few days at The Terrace without deciding that Cousin Shirley had allowed herself to be too much affected by her troubles. "I count life just a stuff to try one's strength on," she repeated to herself.

"Well, grief as a means of self-culture, — wouldn't that defeat itself?" asked Shirley, with some irony.

"Of course," May assented; "only, one must use every experience. Life is so full, so rich when one has escaped from the thralldom of the self into the universal."

Mary Dunham was fond of talking about "life." She gathered data as eagerly as a naturalist his specimens. She was full of enthusiasm for humanity in the large, and had not yet learned that one can know humanity through the every-day relations with those nearest us. Her own experience seemed "rich and full,"

to use her words, since she had found her niche in a city settlement. She was skeptical of powers that could be developed in such limited surroundings as a village of this sort, for instance. One needed large associations, and plenty of material! She wished sometimes that she were on speaking terms with all the world.

Men to her were simply human beings. If women could only get rid of their absurd sex quavers, they could enjoy their companionship in a rational way. She had experienced plenty of it herself, she averred. In truth, she knew no other.

Her style was intellectual and attractive. She moved about in her plain linens like a clean-limbed, deep-chested boy. In a few days she had adapted herself to Shirley's bachelor housekeeping. Her half of it she accomplished with scientific zeal. When she spilled ammonia on the matting by mistake, she ran for the vinegar cruet; and drove the squash bugs into neighbors' gardens by scattering moth-balls among their own vines.

She accompanied her cousin on her nondescript errands, or even volunteered to be her deputy. On such an occasion, one afternoon, she encountered Dale in a back lane. They met nearly every day, and he interested her more than at first. She was adding data to her experience, she told herself, by studying him. Disinterested study of one's fellow creatures is commendable, the only drawback to it being that the other person is as likely to be studying you.

"Good afternoon. Have you been making calls?" he inquired.

"Does this look like it?" she replied, shaking her little basket at him. "It seems to be the custom here

to send a piece of a fresh loaf of cake to some one."

"A very nice custom. I would it extended to me," said Dale.

"Too late," said May, showing her square teeth. "I have just come from Mrs. Ebbitts'."

He looked curious.

"May I ask how you get on with that old lady?"

"She is very subjective," May answered, delighted to discuss types. "She complained a good deal of her relatives. She would have gone on that way for an hour, presumably, if I had not tried to divert her mind; but she refused to be diverted. She asked me why my cousin hadn't come. She didn't want folks to talk, she said; she wanted 'em to listen!"

"She is a puzzle; but probably if either of us had lived in a back room in a village for fifteen years because our relatives preferred to pay for our lodging, rather than have a person of our cranky habits in the house, our minds would need ventilation, too."

"I should get over the habits," said May. "This is the first time I have ever stayed in a New England village — of course summer hotels do not count — and I must say that some things seem to me queer."

"For instance?"

"Why cannot a place like this support its library better, when it has had such a building given to it? There is money enough here."

"Or its churches," said Dale to himself, thinking of last Sunday's offering. No world-sympathy here!

"Some of these memorial libraries entail too much running expense upon small towns."

"I know, but I should think they would rather tax

themselves what they could afford, than to depend upon outsiders like the Gilmores."

"Are the Gilmores to do anything?"

"Miss Gilmore means to give a lawn party for the fund. She is coming down this afternoon to talk over the details. You will come up?"

Shirley sat on the broad stone steps on the south side of the house, with Ada Kent and Flora Pember. The latter was very uncomfortable. She thought Miss Shirley "perfectly lovely," but she had once overheard Ada Kent call her, Flora, "the wooden image." She was a girl of eighteen, with timid, watchful eyes under an exaggerated pompadour. Her bead chains rattled against her flat chest. Being at the age when a girl weaves air castles out of slender materials, she had woven a few dreams about the new minister. When he seated himself beside her on the lower step, she drew away from pure nervousness, and almost immediately got up.

"Must you go, Flora?" Shirley asked.

"Yes, ma'am."

"I hoped you would stay to hear Miss Gilmore's plans."

"I don't believe I'd better," said the girl, breathlessly, sinking down again. To put her at her ease Dale asked her a question about the Endeavor Society. In a minute or two a flush came into her cheeks, her answers grew longer; she turned her shoulder pointedly away from the rest. She would show that Ada Kent, she thought.

"Shall we not discuss this another time?" Dale asked, finally, growing uneasy. In spite of himself he was stiff.

"Oh, if you'd rather; I only thought I'd ask you," she stammered, feeling snubbed. Just how it happened that she found May Dunham beside her she never knew. May's voice was friendly, her manner not at all supercilious. She forgot her wounded pride presently in confiding to her new acquaintance that she was beginning to read Browning.

"Don't you think he is deep, Miss Dunham? Don't you think he has a great deal of *soul*?"

"Yes, indeed," answered May, cordially. "Have you read 'Andrea del Sarto'?"

"Yes, and I am trying to read 'Childe Roland,' but Miss Hitchcock has the notes, and I don't know what he means. What do you think he means, Miss Dunham?"

"I think he means that it is well for us all to blow a strong blast before our own dark towers." May's words came out clear and full. Dale heard, and looked up. Their eyes met. May was too well-trained to be disturbed, but her pulse quickened a little, such a sudden softening was in the look. It is hard to analyze a man coolly when his eyes soften like that.

The truth was, Dale had just had his vision again of the ideal society, and he felt small. How foolish he was to have been irritated by a raw young girl who had merely acted from primitive instincts. Instead of being curt, he might have said — what might he have said? Never mind, Miss Dunham had made up for his stupidity. With what tact she had quieted the girl's little flutters! He had no tact at all. (He forgot that he was a man, while she was a woman.) He was still eating humble-pie when Ruth Gilmore stopped her runabout at the bridge, and ran up to the porch.

"Here is a cushion, Miss Gilmore," said Ada, showing animation for the first time, but Ruth ignored her with frank rudeness, and seated herself at Shirley's feet. Her devotion to Shirley DeForest had been the topic of the hour last season. Shirley treated it with good-humored indifference, — which was all affectation, said Ada to herself.

"One poor man; you look mighty lonesome," began Miss Gilmore, turning a saucy face toward Dale.

"I am beginning to feel a cold chill," he answered. This blue-eyed thing had a tongue! How amazingly pretty she was in that yellowish frock with its lace insertions. Ruth laughed.

"Well, it is just as well you are here, for I want to have everything decided. Papa says we shall have the Hungarian band from New York."

"It will cost more than the receipts will come to."

"Papa says I may have it," Ruth repeated; "and now, shall we put the tickets at a dollar, or only fifty cents?"

"A dollar," said Ada. "Keep out all the second-rate people."

"I don't want to keep any one out. Papa says there is room enough on our grounds for all Waukomis, and, besides, it doesn't make any difference up here."

"You will have all those low people from Railroad Street," Ada objected.

"What people?"

"Why, Feldhusen, and Lutz the barber, and that horrid Regan of the salon."

"He is civil enough to me," said Dale. "I had occasion to go into his saloon one night, and as I did not know the etiquette of his establishment I asked

him if a man who did not drink was at liberty to come in. He said (Dale's shoulders shook gently; he had in fact felt exceedingly out of place): 'Any one is welcome to come in here as long as he behaves like a gentleman.' "

Ruth showed lively interest.

"Was there a scrap? It would have been such fun! That is the way it always is in books; they knock some one down, or do athletic stunts, or give the bad boy a thrashing."

"The presumption being that a minister must be shown to have the same red blood in him as other men, before the fact can be accepted, after which the story may be allowed to proceed," said Dale, dryly.

"Would you knock a man down if he interfered with you?" asked Ruth.

"I sincerely hope the contingency will never arise."

"But would you?" she persisted.

"I would rather help him up, Miss Gilmore."

Dr. Kent drove slowly into the yard. The horse looked tired; the man himself, worn and dispirited.

"Are you ready to go, Ada?" he called. "If you are, I will drive you home."

"In a minute, David," she answered, and turning eagerly to Miss Gilmore, added:

"If I can be of any help to you be sure to let me know."

"Well, I will send Duclos down for you to-morrow, and we will plan it," Ruth answered. Ada's eyes sparkled. Dr. Kent beckoned to Shirley, and she went up to the buggy.

"It died this afternoon," he said, in a low tone.

"The baby? Oh, David, how sorry I am for them and for you!"

"It might have lived. They ought to have sent for me before." Tears welled up in his eyes.

"Now I am ready, dear," said Ada, coming up. She added the last word because Putty Face, as she called Shirley, was standing by. She resented it that her picture and the one of his college chum who had died were always on David's mantel. She not only wanted him to love her best; she wanted him to love no one but herself. David's nature was always getting out of reach. Every one knew that such sick-looking women always hung on a man when they could. What if she had lost her family and her money? That happened to hundreds, and they got over it.

"Good-bye, Miss Shirley," she said, sweetly. She always said "Miss Shirley." And Shirley understood—in part. She loved David dearly; she wanted to put her arms around him whenever he was hurt; but there was a numb spot in herself, and she was glad of it. She had struggled with destiny until she was exhausted. She did not want to feel any more.

"They are going to do the thing handsomely," said Ada, on the way home. "It is no more than they ought to do, I'm sure, with all their money. What? The baby dead? Then you won't have to rush way up there any more. I wish you would come up-stairs and smooth my forehead, David, I have such a headache!"

Left behind, the others were wandering through Shirley's garden, when Dale presently heard a low, toneless voice behind him saying:

"Mr. Dale?"

He turned, to face Miss DeForest. She was stand-

ing before him with her chin raised and her hands clasped behind her, looking thoroughly mistress of herself.

“Why did you put yourself in a false light a little while ago?” she demanded.

CHAPTER TEN

"I BEG pardon?" he inquired, in surprise.

"You laughed at yourself because you were uncomfortable. Was not your errand successful?"

"Not entirely."

"Your sense of humor is like the scorpion's sting; you turn it on yourself rather than draw other fires," she continued. "Take care that you do not do it too often; it will not be understood."

"You read me well," he said, gravely.

She smiled.

"I am your senior, and I have known a good many men and women."

"Evidently." The answer was almost too ready.

"Tell me whom you wanted to see," she went on.

"His name is Enovitch."

"The man who was at the Town Farm?"

"Yes. He works at the Bakers', out of the village, but comes into town Saturday nights."

"Does he drink much?"

"Not very much. I think he goes there now because he expects to find me there," he said, frowning in perplexity. "He seems to have a liking for me. He is lonely. These aliens, — we have no comprehension of their lives. He speaks very little English, and there is no Polish church that I can unload him on. I must try to help him myself. If I only knew how —"

A few minutes later he became aware that he was being delicately turned inside out, and furthermore, that the process was not exactly unpleasant. No doubt it had happened to many another! He drew back into his shell.

"Will you promise me your help? They need to learn English," he asked.

"I do not know anything about such work, as May does. It may be my weakness, but I prefer to live with my equals," said Miss DeForest.

"I need help, and I must have it," he answered. "May I count on you if I can get half a dozen of them together? Will you do it for four?"

"Get them first," she answered.

"I intend to do so," he said; "and when I have succeeded I shall remind you of this talk."

On Saturday evening he stood again in front of Regan's saloon. The interior smelled of beer, sawdust, and kerosene. Paul Enovitch sat by himself at one of the tables, a schooner of beer before him. He was in no haste to empty it; it was his ticket of admission to the only club he knew. Every time the painted screen door swung inward, he turned his head expectantly, in his mild eyes the hunger of a dumb being for companionship. Dale touched him on the shoulder. Paul looked up, and something in his eyes sprang.

"How you wass?" was his greeting. He pushed his glass timidly toward Dale.

"Thanks, I don't drink it," said Dale, sitting down opposite. "Are you waiting for some one?"

"It wass last time they come," said Paul, gesticulating in the effort to express himself. "Many — so

much many. They speak like me." He tapped his chest. "Maybe they come to-night."

Dale had often seen wagon-loads of farm hands driving into town from no-license villages near by. He had heard the street echo with their drunken mirth as they drove home.

"It is nine o'clock; I hardly think they will come now," said he. "Come home with me for a little while."

"You want?" asked Paul, eagerly.

"Yes."

Paul followed him like a dog up the hill and past the drug store, where several very young girls were greedily sipping ice-cream soda, bareheaded, and watched by the men who stood at the cigar counter, their hats clapped on the backs of their heads. The clerk was in his shirt-sleeves. The unlovely side of rural life weighed on Dale's senses like the murky atmosphere. They had reached the corner of Main Street when a bulky man in a well-cut gray suit ran into them.

"I beg pardon," said Dale, without stopping.

Mr. Gilmore looked after him a moment ere he joined a group idling on the sidewalk. "Who is that fellow? I did not recognize him," he said.

Mr. Sutherland, the bank cashier, laughed.

"That's the new minister. He's got a half-witted fellow in tow, playing Mammy to him. Fetches him out of Regan's when he thinks he's had enough."

"He does, does he?" said Mr. Gilmore.

Dale brought phosphate for his unexpected guest, and opened a magazine at a description of Ellis Island. At sight of the pictures Enovitch showed considerable excitement.

"I wass there," he said, breaking into rapid Polish and making gestures; and as Dale failed to comprehend, he seized a pencil and made passes over his shoulders.

"Chalked the back of your coat, — why?"

The Pole shook his head. He had been let in; that was all he knew.

"Enovitch, you must learn more English," said Dale. Enovitch watched him speak, and answered slowly, with effort:

"It iss a thing offly hard."

"I know it, but you must," said Dale, giving him a lesson then and there by the aid of the pictures. At the end of fifteen minutes the man's head dropped on his chest; he was asleep. Dale woke him at half-past nine, and sent him home. This went on for several weeks. It was not the way he had imagined himself spending his Saturday evenings, but the Pole seemed contented to be there. When he left he said timidly:

"Fren's?"

"Yes."

Paul beamed.

"Fren's. Goo'-bye."

"I believe the chap really cares for me," thought Dale. "Now I have got him what am I to do with him?"

He sent for a Polish Testament and studied it. He tried to put the story of Christ into halting sentences. He had never worked harder in his life. Enovitch grasped but little. To one word, and only one he was responsive. At the word "friend" his whole being brightened.

"Christ is your friend," said Dale, playing on that string.

"Like you?" asked Paul.

"Better," answered Dale, lamely enough. Paul laughed incredulously.

"You say. I know nothing."

"But I know," said Dale, firmly. "I tell you what I know. That is my business; and you must learn to understand what I say." And he took him into the church they were passing, and led him to a seat in the gallery. He was to sit there Sundays, he explained. The choir were rehearsing a puerile hymn which his own masculine taste abhorred. He recalled the passionate fervor of the voices singing a requiem mass in St. Patrick's cathedral:

*"Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa Tuæ viae,
Ne me perdas illa die —"*

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said the organist, looking around, "I want a better attack there. All together! 'Beautiful land of Somewhere!'"

"Beautiful land of Somewhere!" Had militant Protestantism sunk to this?

But the man beside him had pricked up his ears happily.

"Let him stay, and see that he is well treated," commanded the minister, when they told him that the Polander haunted the church at choir practice. He went to see the farmer who employed him.

"We haven't room for him in the wagon. Of course, if he wants to walk it — but you'll have a tough job trying to get religion into that fellow. He's half-witted.

Work's the best religion for him. He sleeps Sunday mornings. Yes, sir, rolls himself up in the clothes, boots and all."

Still the minister persisted. He was on his mettle now. He meant to get those four men for Miss De-Forest. Not that he felt confident that she would know what to do with them, but she had challenged him somehow. As for Miss Dunham, she had promptly shown herself to be a trained worker, and he was grateful. He wished that she were to be there all the year round.

The organist, who was also the village dentist, did not expect the visit Dale paid him shortly afterward. A convenient reputation for irritability combined with the self-conceit of the (musically) one-eyed man among the blind to make him an autocrat whom no one ventured to oppose. If the minister would attend to his own end of the church, he hinted, he would see to *his* end. What Griggs had called Dale's "Chinese face" stood him in good stead. He was polite, imperturbable, and determined. He made it understood that in future his approval was to be looked for, and that effeminate music was to be dropped. A trifle elated over his victory, he overheard some one say that the pastor did not seem to have much to do, for he was "on the go" all the time. For the moment he wished that his lines had been cast among cowboys.

Meanwhile, May Dunham was enjoying the summer after her own fashion. The study of a New England community in its transitional state was, she felt, yielding her a great deal of material. She meant to work it up into something. She plied her cousin with questions.

"Why did they let the Odd Fellows have the ex-

clusive use of the library hall? I should think the village had something to say about it. It ought to be a civic center. No Consumers' League, or Needlework Guild? I'll send you circulars. It seems to me you are dreadfully self-centered up here. What do the women do besides that club? Bridge? Oh! copying the follies of cities. Why don't you all try to work out something characteristic?"

She sent home for her portfolio of Andrea del Sarto to show Flora Pember.

"But I want to help that girl's soul," she remonstrated, when Shirley objected to an informal morning call.

"It is no use making short cuts with timid people, whose one desire is to be just like every one else," Shirley replied. "If you really want to help her 'soul,' take time to do the conventional thing."

"Well, I will," said May, good-naturedly, but the visits, from her point of view, were not a success. Miss Pember was too full of the coming lawn party to remember Browning, and her mother had wandered in wearing her gingham apron, had apologized, and been self-conscious.

"Weren't you a bit self-conscious with her?" queried Shirley, wickedly. "Weren't you thinking that you would like to inspire her with higher ideals? Oh, don't take it seriously. Laugh!"

"I do not see anything to laugh at," said May. "It is evident that I failed in tact, somehow. Thank you for calling my attention to it."

"I wish she wouldn't! But she is honest — honest," thought Shirley.

"What do you make of that?" asked Dr. Kent

one afternoon, jerking his head toward the road down which May had just started for a walk with Dale.

She answered without hesitation.

"The flirtation of the serious-minded. They coquet with life, instead of with each other."

"You don't think that he — ?"

Her reply was enigmatical.

"She tells him a great many things. May regards men, not as men, but as human beings. She rates them at 1, and adds on when they deserve it. I used to credit a new man with 100, and subtract afterward."

This because May had criticized Dale's last sermon upon the Prodigal Son. "That about the three parables being one, to illustrate heredity, circumstance, and free-will, was rather strikingly put; otherwise, there was nothing original about it," she had said.

"May, did you ever try to write a sermon?"

"No, I have never had any occasion to use the sermon form, but of course it is perfectly simple."

"You believe, then, that women can do anything they choose?"

"Anything that they have brains and will for," May answered; and Shirley reflected that the self-confident modern spirit made it half true, and felt herself hopelessly superannuated.

Nevertheless, May was now engaged in the process of "adding on." From being a "nice, chubby little man," Dale had become an interesting entity to be fathomed for the sake of the data he would add to her experience of life. She planned leading questions to draw him out, but forgot to ask them when he showed a desire to hear about her settlement work, as now.

"How does it differ at bottom from what your cousin

is doing?" he asked finally, as they climbed the hill together toward the little waterfall he had promised to show her.

"Shirley?" asked May, astonished.

"Yes. She is giving most of her time to help her neighbors."

"Yes, but she could accomplish twice as much if she would only come down to us. We get an enormous stimulus from association."

"That I grant. Besides, it is easier to become interested in another class than to live well with one's neighbors."

"But they are my neighbors," said May, quickly. "You do not understand; presumably you have never felt the inspiration which comes from giving one's self to the neediest. They need us!"

"No doubt; but do you think there is no need of idealism in a place like this? It seems to me no small thing to go among them with sympathy, and yet not make a career of it."

From their vantage point, the long feline curves of the hills which walled in the valley could be seen. The village played hide and seek with them from below.

"It ought to have been called 'The Cubby Hole,'" May declared. Dale laughed his discreet, infectious laugh.

"Don't shoot! We are doing the best we can. I am attached to the spot already."

"One naturally feels that way about his first parish." The tone was not consciously patronizing, yet he did not take the trouble to undeceive her.

"This is really a very materialistic little place,"

she went on. "What has become of the old-time culture we used to read about?"

"It may have been idealized a bit. Art is selective. The best appears typical."

"It is not so now. My cousin is not the type; she is the exception."

"Yes."

"I believe that the conquest of physical forces has raised the standard of comfort without stimulating us to advance through that comfort. What is the use of having more time and ease, if it does not set one free for higher occupations? I have heard more about dress and such 'tuppenny' things here than I hear all the year round at home."

"Do your Russian Jews never talk about dress?"

"Not with us."

"Probably not," said Dale soberly, though his eyes danced.

"They have souls that hunger for beauty. If you could see them at one of our loan exhibitions —"

"I should think that their best was typical. Are you sure that you are not doing the same? Remember that these small towns have been drained of their life blood. Now that the tide has turned to the country again, the old order is gone, and it is too soon to say what the new order will be. It is no wonder if some unbeautiful things come to the top."

"What they need is stronger intellectual interests," said May.

"What we need," said Dale, "is the consciousness of the Spirit of God! Just how does Christianity translate itself to you at present, Miss Dunham?"

"I believe in its ethics; but I do not care much

about creeds," she answered, thinking a little. "Humanity is my religion. So long as people are giving themselves to the service of others, I do not care what they believe."

"Is it any part of your programme that humanity should give itself to serve you?"

"Certainly not. That would spoil all. It would be making a bargain with the universe. Why do you ask?"

"Because I was wondering if you had followed out your altruistic programme to its logical end. Nothing lasts, not even a religion, unless it can propagate itself. This religion of serving others presupposes that there will always be 'others' who will graciously allow themselves to be served. What religion are they to have?"

She did not catch his drift.

"Whatever suits their need best."

"You would not wish to convert them to your own ideas?"

"I should of course wish them to have the inspiration of the highest motives."

"But your motive," he persisted, "your religion is to do for others what they cannot do for you. Do you want to make them like yourself? Or would you rather not, lest there should not be enough material left for altruism to exercise itself upon?"

"Not enough?" she cried, turning to him swiftly; and for the first time he saw tears in her eyes. "If you could only see the misery, the patience, the tragedy of it all!"

"And in the face of that awful need, what are ethical systems and neighborly kindness worth, without the one thing that makes the heart of it all? You are

bailing the sea with a sieve! Christianity is not a system of ethics, nor a religion of humanity. It is an absorbing personal friendship — a passion — and we are losing the consciousness . . . !”

He broke off abruptly, and, turning away, hurled pebbles into the water. His face was stern. No woman can see real emotion in any man unmoved, and May, after that one quick glance, was silenced. She wondered at herself afterward, for surely there was more to be said.

“He would not have said that to every one,” she reflected, not without a feeling of pleasure.

She did not know that it was the sight of the tears in her eyes that had broken down his reserves.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"HOW do I look, David?" asked Ada Kent, fluttering into the office where Dr. Kent sat in his linen coat, filling his medicine case.

"Very pretty gown, but over-trimmed," was his comment. "I have told you before, Ada, that you look best in plain skirts with unbroken lines, like Shirley DeForest's. She knows how a small woman ought to dress."

The remark was unfortunate. Ada's sensuous lip curled, showing her sharp little teeth.

"When I am her age, perhaps I shall take the Sister-of-Charity pose, too."

"Shirley never poses."

Ada shrugged her shoulders.

"Are you coming up later?"

"No, I am not; and I wish you would not be so keen over it. You would not care a pin for the Gilmores if it were not for their money."

"I am willing to help them get rid of it!"

"Remember how he made it," said Dr. Kent. "Listen, Ada. I don't dislike the man or his daughter, — the mother's a nullity. On the contrary, I rather like them both. But that man has ruined others without remorse. He has made his pile by all sorts of tricks. They may have been out of reach of the law, but they are a long way from righteousness."

Ada trilled a silvery laugh.

"How absurd for you to set up for a moralist, David, when you hardly ever go to church!"

Most things were absurd to Ada Kent which did not concern her own feelings. Just now, as she rolled swiftly up the hill in the Gilmores' Panhard, she was chiefly conscious of her triumph over Mrs. Sutherland, who had been willing to lend her ideas to the Gilmores' fête, but who had not been asked for them.

If Mrs. Sutherland had consulted her private feelings, she would have gone to bed, instead of massaging her face carefully according to the directions in the "Woman Beautiful," and donning her new grenadine. By arriving at a judicious moment she might create the impression that she had been invited to help receive for the latter part of the time.

"The effect is perfectly charming!" she said impressively to Mrs. Gilmore, who stood with Ruth at the foot of the steps.

"Very pleased, I am sure. I didn't quite catch the name?" inquired Mrs. Gilmore; and Ada, standing near, smiled maliciously.

"What do you want to mix yourself up with these provincials for?" Mrs. Gilmore had complained to Ruth.

"I am provincial myself," Ruth answered.

"I would have more pride than to say so, even if it were true."

"It is true. We are nobodies in New York, for all our money, Mamma, and you know it."

"We had more attention last winter," said her mother. "I suppose you would rather see yourself surrounded by nobodies?"

"No, I want to be surrounded by somebodies of my own choosing. Do you call Shirley DeForest a nobody?"

"Miss DeForest is different," said her mother, more graciously. She hoped to persuade Miss DeForest to go abroad with them. It would give her confidence. She feared the New York women she struggled with for recognition. She feared Ruth, who feared no one, and said everything that came into her head. "She ought to help more. It all comes on me," thought the poor woman.

"Is that Mrs. Hitchcock, with a face like a gargoyle?" she murmured in Ruth's ear. She had taken the phrase from one of the society novels whose unattainable smartness gave her a discouraged sensation at the pit of her stomach. It was easy to look smart — Virginie saw to that — but if she could only feel smart!

"Yes; and the man coming through the gate in the white flannel coat and duck trousers, with the diamond horse-shoe is — oh, how do you do, Miss Prindle?"

Mr. Regan had intended to smoke, but his heart having failed him at the gate, he carried his still fuming cigar in his hand. He diffused a strong odor of Jockey Club.

"Good afternoon, Ma'am," said he, seizing the hand which Mrs. Gilmore, hypnotized by this apparition, forgot to offer. "The heavens have smiled on your little fête (he pronounced it 'feet'), for a finer day I never saw. We'll have to be calling it Gilmore weather, I'm thinking."

"I should be delighted to have such weather called for me," replied Ruth, unoffended, yet keeping her

distance as her mother had not been able to do. She looked as lithe as a reed in her fawn-colored frock. Mr. Regan said to himself that there was no nonsense about her; and he would have held his ground, and talked to her, but he did not know how.

"Who was that dreadful man?" inquired Mrs. Gilmore, irritably.

"The saloon-keeper, Mr. Patrick Regan."

"Horrors!"

But Ruth only laughed, a mocking little laugh.

"She is a pretty little girl. Has she a quarrel with the universe?" asked Dale of Shirley, who had backed up against a group of red cannas which contrasted with her worn face and black dress. He rather liked the effect, especially when she raised to his the innocent, quiet eyes of a woman who has got over feeling young.

"I should like you to understand her," she replied. "If she had been born a princess she would have made a charming one; her impulses are princess-like. Or it would not have hurt her to be poor. But she is the only child of a rich man with no past, and no well-defined position; and it grates on her."

"Will they try to win position?" he asked, a good deal interested.

"Not if it depends upon her. She is too proud. She is almost fiercely honest. She looks you in the face and says superfluous truths, and sometimes her very audacity succeeds. But I do not think she cares whether it does or not; she is only trying to get on firm ground."

"She has a great fancy for you."

"Just now, yes. She will get over it."

"Do you want her to get over it?"

She looked up, surprised at his tone, but did not answer.

"In my freshman year," said Dale, "I had a friend older than I who snubbed me much as you snub Miss Gilmore. He liked me, but either I was fresh, and bored him; or—for he was a proud, crotchety fellow—he would not let himself out because he thought it would not last. He was wrong. He might have had me for life; and now I do not even know what became of him. You are hard on that little girl, as he was hard upon me." There was a ring of pain in his voice. For some reason she felt rebuked.

"I do not think I am," she answered. "I care for her in my own way."

"In your own way, yes. You do not mean to let yourself go. You want to keep a little circle drawn around yourself at just such a distance . . . you are wrong," and, lifting his hat, he walked away, leaving Shirley as nearly angry as she had been for many a day. That a man should confide in her was an everyday thing, but for him to put a finger on her inner life was presumptuous!

Little recked Dale. He had freed his mind, and felt relieved. By this time the lawn was dotted with groups of people. The band was playing a ravishing slow waltz. He strolled toward the pergola, looking for May. A pudgy hand clapped him on the shoulder. It was Mr. Gilmore, neither bored nor pretending to be bored by his own hospitality.

"How are you, Dale? Well, it's quite a show to see all Waukomis out, isn't it? I'm told it takes the Fair to get them together, and then they don't mix. I wish they would act as if they enjoyed themselves."

"They seem to be enjoying themselves now," said Dale, politely.

"Not in the way I mean. When people are touch-and-go happy their eyes shine. I've got into the way of noticing eyes. Jewels in the head — that's what they ought to be — and most of them are imitation. See anyone here whose eyes shine? Nobody, unless it's my girl. By the way, she asked me if I knew how Oliver Wendell Holmes sized up this sort of thing. Ever hear it? He called it, 'Giggle, gaggle, goggle, git!'"

"I beg pardon?"

"'Gibble —'" Mr. Gilmore looked suddenly illuminated — "'giggle — gabble, gobble, *git!*' I've got that twisted once before; I'll leave her to say it next time." His laugh was like a child's.

"And this is the man whose schemes are the byword of the yellow journals," thought Dale, fascinated.

"How is that Polish fellow of yours?" inquired Mr. Gilmore, abruptly.

"He is doing well on a farm."

"Did he swear off?"

"Oh, he never drank much. He went to Regan's for company."

"Follow you around now?"

"Sometimes." Dale winced a bit inwardly. He knew that on Market Street they called Enovitch "the parson's lamb."

"He's got sand! I'm going to leave a check with him before I go," thought Mr. Gilmore.

"Now I'm ready to relieve you; you must be tired," said Ada, fluttering up to May, just as the two men approached the frappé table under the pergola. May

regarded her indulgently, as a Newfoundland dog might look at a King Charles spaniel.

"I am not tired," she answered with a smile.

"Idiot!" said Ada to herself.

"Oh, if there are attractions — !"

"Not-at-all," said May, in her most collegiate tone. "I shall be happy to retire in your favor," and she walked off without heat. Ada slipped into her place, and waited, glancing obliquely from time to time at that burly form close by. She had the instincts of the courtesan without the opportunities, and she felt herself full of untried powers. Of a man's world apart from women she knew and cared nothing. Mr. Gilmore could do everything for them if she could only work it, as women did in novels. The thought of his great income irritated her nerves to concert pitch. Ah, Mr. Dale was going. She was glad of that. She disliked him because she had once caught a look in his sedate face as though he were amused at her. Ada did not wish to amuse men; she wished to have power over them.

"Will you have some frappé, Mr. Gilmore?" she asked, in her distinct little voice. Mr. Gilmore started, looked around, and came forward.

"I don't know but I will," said he. "What are they thinking of to leave a little woman like you to hold the fort all alone?"

"Oh, I do not mind getting tired in a good cause," said Ada. "I am never very strong, you know," with a pathetic smile. "I am glad to help in my poor way; you have been so kind to open these lovely grounds to us."

"They are neat, aren't they?" asked Mr. Gilmore,

in a burst of confidence. "My landscape gardener told me I had a fine thing of it with that grove of white oaks. Piggott from New York, he is. 'A little higher in price, but,—' like Ferris' ham, you know."

"It is charming in summer; but I envy you your winters in New York."

"Why? Don't you like it here?"

"No, I am too much of a cosmopolitan," said Ada, who had never been five hundred miles away from home. "Of course we shall move some time. My husband is too clever to live in a country town all his life. One has more friends of one's own stamp in a city; don't you think so? I don't know why people should be so devoted to poor little me," and she arched her eyebrows sweetly.

"Nice little woman," thought her hearer, absently. His mind was on the C. C. and X. railroad, which he was anxious to control. One man balked him. It had been a hard fight, but he had got hold of a new handle now, and he meant to win. Ada's little flutters affected him as little as a butterfly hovering near by. He noticed vaguely that both butterflies were pretty, and had gauzy wings.

Meanwhile May had wandered through the gardens until she came upon a spot which suited her better than the velvety smoothness of the lawns. It was an uncultivated meadow behind the kitchen garden, descending to the river, and smoking with the browns and purples of tall, sunlit grass. She was annoyed at being addressed in such a tone, as if she were an ordinary girl with a love affair on her mind. Dale was interesting, much more so than she had thought him

at first, — she hoped she could be candid in such matters. He was worth studying, she admitted, and she enjoyed his conversation and his friendship. When men and women learned to think of each other primarily as human beings, their companionship would rise to a higher plane. Of course Mrs. Kent could never understand that; her type was too subjective. It was a great misfortune for Dr. Kent; he deserved a wife who was his equal, whom he could love.

The Mary Dunhams of this world never understand that there are men who love a woman not because she deserves it, but because they are loving.

"Dum, dum," said a small voice. May turned her head. On the other side of the fence stood a little boy with a cherubic face, very dirty. His impish black eyes were fixed solemnly upon her. His hair curled in tendrils of red gold.

"Hullo, infant, come here," said May in her best comrade tone. Nothing loath, the child crawled through, and regarded her in curiosity.

"How did you get up here?"

"Dum, dum," said Joey.

"You mean the music, don't you? Shall I tell you a story?" Dropping on one knee, she manipulated her handkerchief rapidly, telling at the same time a story of a white rabbit which ran away from home to a lettuce garden. "So when the white rabbit saw the gardener coming to catch him, he went hop! hop! and never stopped until he was safe at home," she concluded.

"Aden! Jump him aden!"

"Why, this is a friend of mine," said Dale's voice behind them. "Hullo, Joey! Where's Mamma?"

"Mamma dawn. Joey all alone. Came to hear dum, dum."

"He has probably run away. I must take him home. Come, Joey, we will go home together."

Joey lay down on the ground and kicked.

"Don't awnt. Awnt dum, dum."

Dale looked perplexed.

"I can manage him all right if you will show me the way," said May. She tucked the white rabbit into the little hands. "He was so glad to get home safely that he went to sleep. Don't wake him up." She swung the child lightly to her shoulder, and, taking her skirt in her free hand, started down-hill through the tall grass. Her fine figure was bent backward under her burden. Dale looked at her sidewise; he felt a sudden softening of fiber.

They found the cottage closed, the door fast.

"I cannot see where he could have climbed out," said Dale, after examining all the windows.

"No matter; I will wait here for his mother," and May seated herself on the door-step.

"Then I will wait, too, for I do not know how long it may be before she returns." He sat down beside her. There was just room enough for the three, the man and woman who did not belong to each other, and the child who was nothing to either. Joey was already half asleep. Over the hill came the music of Dvořák's Slavonian Dances. The sunset turned the dust in the road to gold.

"Miss Cole will be worried if Joey gets this habit of running away," Dale began, and then bit his lip at his remark. May did not ignore it as a Waukomis

girl would have done; she turned and faced him squarely, in indignant pity.

"Do you mean that she is not married?" she asked.

"Oh, poor little boy! I am so sorry."

"He has a hard future before him, I am afraid," said Dale, in a low tone. "The village people are waiting with bated breath, so to speak, to see him go wrong; and then they will ascribe it to heredity."

"Whose fault will it be if he goes wrong, when they create such influences against him?" she flashed out. "Oh, cannot you show her that it is not heredity but education that counts? Cannot you make her see how noble it is to rise above the past? She must live for her child. She must call all the powers of the universe to her aid, and conquer the forces which would drag them both down."

His hand grasped hers in the dusk. For a small hand it had a surprisingly masculine touch. She felt it for some time afterward.

"I like to hear you speak like that! But I do not think that Myrtie Cole is of the sort to draw nourishment from ideas. She is a weak young girl, all alone in the world. She needs something to love, to worship — something to hang on."

"In that case she should be taught to trust herself more."

"On the contrary, I would rather see her more dependent."

"You would?" Her voice sounded rather scornful.

"I would have her throw herself upon God. When a woman of her weak fiber trusts in her own strength, she is lost. Do you know what hinders us Americans most from realizing the kingdom of God among us?"

It is our self-will, our racial self-conceit, our feeling that of ourselves we can do pretty much everything."

"But —" she began, and stopped. His face had a dark, plastic beauty; the moonlight struck on his brow and eyes. She felt, rather than heard, his deep breathing. In spite of herself, her own pulse quickened. She began to feel nervous, pent up in her corner. She had despised these "sex quavers."

One by one, myriad lanterns on the hill shone out like fireflies in the dusk. Joey had gone to sleep against her shoulder. Dale stole a glance at her. She looked womanly so. It stirred him. He craved his share of these primal experiences, his right to find, to love, to give.

"Is she like that at bottom?" he thought.

At last a figure came slowly up the lane, wearing an old tam-o'-shanter, and dragging a basket of clothes upon a child's cart. On top of the basket were two or three paper bags. Myrtie started at seeing some one on her door-step. Dale remembered that afterward.

"Good evening, Myrtie; it is I, Dale," he called; and added under his breath:

"Did they pay you?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Joey heard the band this afternoon, and ran away to the house on the hill, and Miss Dunham has been kind enough to bring him home."

"I'm sure you are very kind," Myrtie faltered. "He gets out of the cellar window; there's only a button on the inside. I don't know what I shall do if he takes to running away." She held out her arms for the sleeping child.

“Let me hold him until you have unlocked the door,” May suggested. Her voice was natural, kind, but not too kind, nor different; and Dale’s heart went out to it in homage. So should it be, so should a woman speak to her sisters.

The streets were deserted as they walked home together in a silence Dale did not try to break. He felt so much nearer to her when she did not talk!

CHAPTER TWELVE

"**A**RE you all alone? What joy!" exclaimed Ruth Gilmore, entering Shirley's garden, next day. "Where is Miss Dunham?"

"She has gone to inquire about the Lutz' baby for me."

Shirley threw down her trowel, and seated herself in a wicker chair which stood under an apple-tree. Disdaining the other chair, Ruth flung herself on the grass and leaned her arms on Shirley's lap, her vivid blue frock widening around her like the cup of a convolvulus.

"Isn't it almost time for her to go home?" she suggested.

"Not yet, I hope. I want her to stay as long as she can."

"You will not be sorry when she goes."

Shirley lifted her eyebrows expressively.

"Ruth, these personal remarks of yours are rather—"

"Oh, I know it, but I never had any bringing-up, you know; I just scrambled up," answered Ruth, carelessly. "People say, 'What can you expect of a person of no antecedents?' If there is any advantage at all in that, I might as well enjoy it. I can't help seeing things. Miss Dunham is awfully capable, I know, but she is so fearfully intelligent! Don't let us talk about her. Shirley — may I call you Shirley?"

"If you like."

"'If you like!'— You are so cold!" Ruth's flower-like face looked hurt. "I thought you perfect the first time I ever saw you . . . I try to get nearer to you . . . I adore you! and you think me just a silly little school-girl."

"No, I do not think you silly, but I am — tired in some ways, Ruth, and I do not care to be adored, as you call it."

"You don't care about caring to be adored, but you like to be adored without caring," said Ruth, sagely. "It is just like that that I want you to be. I should not like to have you care as much for me as I do for you; it would spoil all. I wonder if it was so with the others?"

"What others?"

"The other people who have — adored you."

"You talk great nonsense. I have met with very little of that sort of thing."

"I like it when you frown that way," said Ruth; "and I like that one-sided pucker of your upper lip. You think I am not refined enough to catch your tone, and so you put italics to it in your face. You think I am too — too half-baked to understand you. I understand you better than you think! better than Waukomis does. They come here and tell their troubles; and you smooth them down, and bring out their good points; and they go away saying, 'Miss Shirley is so sympathetic!' You are as hard as nails! They think you care for them —"

"So I do."

"Yes, for themselves, but not for yourself. When I come here to see you I am excited. I think of how

you will look, and what we shall say, but you — you are not excited at all.”

“I am older than you, Ruth,” said Shirley, smiling at this rhapsody.

“There! that is what makes you so fascinating; you won’t even pretend. I say what I think, too, but it is *autre chose*. I wish I could be like you, to tell the truth with a grand air, as if it were the only thing, and no one could possibly be offended. Why won’t you close your house for the winter, and come to live with us? We would do anything for you.”

“If you knew what my home means to me, you would know better than to make such a proposal,” said Shirley.

“You are angry. Well, be angry,” Ruth murmured, her head on Shirley’s knee. “You might at least come with us to Italy; we — ”

“Shir-ley?” called May’s voice from the garden gate. She was hastening toward them.

“Bother!” exclaimed Ruth, springing to her feet.

“The most unpardonable negligence!” May began. “What do you think that woman has been doing? She has been treating her baby’s sore eyes with rotten apples, instead of taking it to the doctor. Dr. Kent says the sight of one eye will be lost. He is afraid the other eye will be blind, too.”

“Oh-h!” gasped Ruth, pitifully.

“I have seen such ignorance on the East Side, but in a village like this — ” May was at white heat. “She is in hysterics, now that it is too late. She is wailing about ‘a mother’s feelings.’ She asked me what did I know about children, to be telling her what she ought to have done. I told her I knew a good deal

better than she did, for I had made it my business to learn. For a woman to grudge a dollar to save her baby's eyes, — and now it is too late!"

"Oh, May, God is terribly sorry for us when it is too late!" Shirley exclaimed. "I will go down there at once."

"Well, go, if you think that that kind of sympathy is developmental. I believe in educating people not to make such mistakes."

"Oh, how can you be so hard?" cried Ruth, drying her quick tears. "Just think, if it was your own little baby."

"My children, when I have them, will not go blind from neglect."

"No, I suppose you will bring them up in an incubator," Ruth retorted, "and take their temperature yourself, and know just how much protoplasm or whatever it is there is in all the baby foods."

"I hope so, as to the last," May replied, unruffled. "Babies need scientific treatment, not hap-hazard trust in 'a mother's feelings.' They are little bundles of animal instincts."

"They are not; they are — just babies," said Ruth.

A few days later, half a dozen people were grouped around a gypsy kettle in the woods at the Gorge. Dr. Kent had planned this outdoor tea for May, who was going home that week. The September air was balmy with spice of birch and fir, and one mountain maple on the height opposite had hoisted a red flag to the departing summer. Dale sat on the grass beside May. Since their vigil on Myrtie's door-step, he had not wished to argue with her any more, and when May had pressed home her deductions once or

twice, he had let the discussion drop. Did May miss it? She was inwardly restless.

"I wish Mr. Lowry could have come," she said aloud.

"Who is Mr. Lowry?" inquired Ruth.

"He is a silver worm that lives on old papers," said Ada Kent. "He goes down to the Town Hall evenings and sits there alone in the dark. What takes him there?"

"Mrs. Purple," said Dr. Kent, with conviction.

"He has been coaching May in town history and genealogy," Shirley explained.

"We enjoyed it so much," said May, with one of her frank smiles. "That kind of information always comes in handy sometime."

"Miss Dunham reminds me of the girl I once prescribed a rest cure for," said Dr. Kent, who liked to banter May. "The cure did not work, and I was at a loss to know why, until I discovered that she was employing her time in making words out of a street sign which she could see from her window, and working out a system of mnemonics with the squares in her bed-spread."

May looked interested.

"What was her system?"

Dale suppressed a smile, but it lingered half tenderly about his mouth.

"Shall you be glad to get back to New York?" asked Ada, with a sigh.

"Oh, yes," said May. (Did she sigh, too?) "I long to set eyes on Sophie Belcovitch and Mrs. Angelo Ciccaglione."

"You are from New York, Mr. Dale, aren't you? Papa heard so," Ruth interpolated.

A quick change came over Dale's face. It passed as quickly, but not before Shirley DeForest, glancing up at the sound of his voice, had caught his expression of brooding anger; and realized that no one knew the man who had not seen that look.

"It was my former home," he answered, in obvious constraint.

"Oh, then I shall see — why, I wonder why he did not tell me that?" was May's surprised thought. Moving away, she stepped to the ledge, and looked over at the river, now low for want of rain.

"Take care; the earth crumbles at that spot," warned Dr. Kent, hurrying forward with Dale. He had hardly spoken when her feet slipped, and the rest, in terror, saw her, as the sapling flew back from her careless grasp, sliding down toward the void below. For a heart-beat only; then Dale had thrown his arms around her and the tree, and clasped his hands firmly at her waist.

Some one screamed, but it was not May.

"What shall I do? I can't get my heels into anything," she panted.

"Don't struggle; the tree holds," said Dale. He had been forced to his knees on the very brink, and he had a sickening glimpse of the chasm beyond. She was heavier than he. The tree rocked with the strain upon it . . . it was such a slender little tree! Then some one's arms reinforced him, he did not know whose.

Ruth thrust her long sash into the doctor's hands. "It's four yards long," she said.

"David, don't go near the edge!" cried Ada,

wringing her hands. "You shall not — what is she to you? Oh! Oh!" The hysterical moan made his heart tighten.

Very cautiously he threw the slip-knot of the sash over May's shoulders, and made the other end fast to another tree. May did not lose her nerve. She had found a hold for one foot. Dale released one arm quickly, and between them they hauled her rather ignominiously up the short distance between her and safety.

"Oh, May!" cried her cousin, shakily.

"Dear, I am so sorry! It was my own fault," said May. She looked at them all, her eyes bright with tears. "How good you all were to me! I cannot thank you enough!"

Dale seated himself on a stone a little apart from the rest. His arms felt wrenched from their sockets. Never would he forget that shuddering glimpse he had had of a world of death, defeat, darkness! Oh, life, life, never so sweet as now!

His eyes sought the girl whose danger he had shared, to see if she shared his feeling. Presently May, who had recovered herself admirably, turned and intercepted the look. It was solemn, tender, appealing. It quivered through her like an electric shock.

"He cares for me!" she thought, intensely startled; and turned her head away to hide the color that sprang to her cheeks. Involuntarily she pressed her hands together; they were cold. Interest, attention she was used to, — not tenderness. What should she do? She could not give up her work! She was as fluttered as a schoolgirl. Her thoughts came in jerks, in flushes. She was twenty-four, but she had known nothing of love.

Fortunately for her, Ada distracted the attention of the others by being faint, and lying on the grass with her head on David's knee. She had no patience with situations of which she was not the center. Dale did not hover near, but remained silent on his stone, his head in his hand. She detested Dale.

After that they drove home in the early twilight; and Dale walked across the grass with the cousins to the side door.

"I shall come over to-morrow to say good-bye. I hope you will not be the worse for the fright," he said.

"Oh, no. I am so grateful to you, Mr. Dale!"

He would come . . . he would speak . . . what was she to say?

She stood in the door in a state of nervous tension, longing for action, for some outlet, while Shirley went up-stairs, to take off her dress.

As Shirley moved about, she suddenly perceived that the drawer of her dressing-table had been pulled out a few inches. Was that a creak on the stairs? They had come in so quietly, — was any one in the house?

Startled, she went into the hall. At the same moment there came from below the sound of a heavy fall, and May's voice ringing out above it, exultant, fearless:

"Shirley! Bring a light! Hurry!"

Catching up May's blue kimono from the hall sofa, Shirley ran down-stairs. Face down as he had fallen, and for the moment stunned, a man lay on the rug, with his head muffled in a shawl, while May, kneeling over his prostrate form, tied his hands behind his back with the new clothes-line bought that same morning.

"I've got him, the sneak!" she called in triumph. "I threw your shawl over his head from behind and

tripped him up. He went down beautifully! Stop wriggling so; it is very annoying," she went on, coolly, addressing the burglar, who was heaving and struggling with muttered imprecations. She ran the line from his wrists to his feet, and bound his ankles firmly.

"Now, my friend," said she, "remember that every tug you make draws the cords tighter. I do not think he will give us any more trouble, Shirley."

"A burglar!" exclaimed Shirley, in distress. "No one ever broke into our house before. You are smothering him in that shawl, May."

"I am about to take it off to see what kind of specimen we have captured."

She turned over her prisoner. His coat, pulled apart, showed a gray flannel shirt, and red and blue tie with a rhinestone crescent stuck in it. The boy, for he was hardly more, glared at her in malignant hatred beyond words. He was country-bred. His cheeks were red in the candle-light. His conceited mouth twitched in fury at being trapped by a girl. He could have burst into tears of rage.

"I'd — like to — kill you!" he panted.

"Presumably you would, but you have lost your opportunity," said May, pleasantly. "A regular criminal type, Shirley; see his low forehead, and the shape of his skull? Will you telephone, or shall I?"

"Wait a minute."

"I'll just measure his ear by the Bertillon method. Where did I put my tape measure? Oh, he wriggles his ear, sign of degeneracy —"

"You let me alone!" the boy growled, writhing in his bonds. He moistened his dry lips.

"May, this is my house," Shirley interrupted, in

a tone May had never heard from her before. She stopped at once. Shirley advanced another step and looked down at their prisoner. The boy's bold, frightened eyes were fixed upon her like some hunted animal's.

"Untie his wrists," Shirley commanded.

"He will hurt you, Shirley. Let me telephone to Dr. Kent."

"He will not hurt either of us," said Shirley, in a tone that was a promise. May untied the cords, and the young fellow sat up sullenly to untie his feet.

"Get up," ordered Miss DeForest.

He obeyed, and perceived that the little lady in blue was holding out her hand to him as to a child. He looked furtively around for a chance to escape, but there was none.

"Come," said Shirley. He hesitated, sidled toward her with a sheepish movement, and yielded his rough hand to hers. Taking the light in her other hand she led him into the parlor, while May, who had sense to see that the situation had got beyond her, crouched on the stairs, ready to rush forward if Shirley should need her. This was life, she said to herself. Ah, there it came, first a thud, followed by a smothered gasp. Quick as thought she was at the door, but Shirley waved her back. The boy was sprawling on the floor, with one arm across her lap, and his head down on it.

"Don't! Say, don't look at me like that! I can't stand it; you got to stop! I wouldn't touch your things now; not if I was starving!"

"But you were not starving, were you?" she heard Shirley ask.

"No'm. I ain't going to lie to you. I heard there

was a lady living alone here, and I thought it would be fun to have a look around. I didn't know it was a lady like you. Why don't you have me taken up, like that girl wanted?"

May stole into the library. After a time she heard the front door opened and closed. Shirley entered the room, and flung herself on the couch. She looked exhausted. There was an irregularly shaped spot on the blue kimono just over the knee.

"How brave and quick you were!" she sighed, gratefully.

"Had he taken anything?"

"One or two little trinkets. He gave them back. He is from Jericho, as they call that district over the border. He is not a criminal yet; he is a great, overgrown boy, who does not know what to do with his strength."

"It was fine — fine to tame the animal like that. You are simply wasted in this out-of-the-way place."

"Do you think so?" asked Shirley.

"I wish the Chief had seen it! If you would only throw your lot in with us, Shirley! You could do anything with such psychical powers."

Shirley sat up impatiently.

"What do you think those who have broken themselves against the universe care about 'psychical powers'?" she demanded. "There is no vanity in the world like that vanity! The world does not want to be studied, nor analyzed, nor managed for its good. It wants to be loved! Those powers may be real — yes — when we have got over the desire for them. When we have learned to keep our hands off from the psychical as the Master of Life did when he chose the

harder task, and said: 'If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.' "

May was thoughtful as she hung up the blue gown. The wet spot had dried, but it left a little stain. No man had ever cried in her lap. For so it is with many a woman of to-day. Self-poised and clever, oh, very clever, and a good comrade to a man while they work together at the busy circumference; but when, with doubt and pain, he gropes his way toward the heart of all things, he does not find her there before him, and when his soul cries out it is not at her knees.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MAY finished packing next day in a state of suppressed excitement. Now and then she drew a long breath as if to free herself from some tension; then she remembered that she was living, adding to her experience, and the thought was intoxicating. What should she do? There were so many things to be considered! She could not possibly settle here — there was no *scope* — and it was not the place for him, either. Now if he were in a certain East Side mission she knew, like Father Syms. . . . She pictured him there, led into his true sphere through her influence, looking to her for inspiration. . . . She pulled herself up, for he had said nothing yet; it was his pallor, his deep look, that steel-like grip that she would never forget, that had spoken. When he had told her that he cared for her it would be time enough to think of her answer.

“The most important thing is to act rationally, and not lose one’s vision,” she said to herself.

She came down to tea in the white piqué which Myrtie Cole had tried to iron for her, but changed it afterward for her green foulard. “The skirt hung dreadfully,” she explained.

“Now I am going to slip out before they begin their interminable discussions,” thought Shirley, as Dale appeared at eight o’clock. All day long the storm had

been brewing. The wind swept through the open house, puffing out the curtains. Lightning flashes gave black-green glimpses of the cloistered street beyond, where pavements would soon be dark with rain. They played like a search-light through the garden, showing white-topped bushes struggling and bent. Above, the hill seemed to advance and retreat. Oh, to be wandering up there, drenched to the skin! Always she had had these wild impulses.

Great drops began to pepper the tin roof. They would get wet out there in the porch, she thought, and started through the hall, lamp in hand. The sound of Dale's voice, tense, rapid, earnest, arrested her. She saw him standing outside, with the back of a chair in his nervous grasp. She could not hear his words.

Shirley retreated to the dining-room, and listened to the rain hissing against the glass. She had never once thought of Dale's being in love with May. It was not by discussions upon sociology that she had been made love to, in her day! It seemed she had been mistaken; for no one could have failed to catch the ring of masculine supremacy in his voice. It brooked no denial; it would say its say. And May, did she care for him, after all? She had no idea. "I know nothing about people; I am a back number," she said to herself, with a dry comfort in the slang.

At last Dale went, with quick, muffled footfalls. There followed a swift rush, the jar of the screen door flying back, a swish of silk skirts, and May scudded like a ghost up the stairs.

"What is it? Is anything the matter?" called Shirley, startled.

"No, thanks — it's nothing — all right," May answered, incoherently, and shut her door.

She was no more communicative next morning, but put pepper in her coffee, and said she knew not what, in a manner most abstracted. In fact, a cloud had arisen between the cousins. For Shirley had flatly refused to let May pay her share of the housekeeping, and May was deeply hurt. Women ought to be open with each other in business matters, she had said. But Shirley had replied that this was not a business matter, and both were unhappy. Shirley, however, would not yield. She went to the station with May, and at parting they kissed each other good-bye; but there was something lacking in the kiss.

Shirley walked home alone. The rain had washed sand into the gutters, and left the clear air heady like champagne. She went into the parlor on the left of the hall. Climbing upon a chair, she took Don's sword from its place over his portrait, and drew it from its scabbard. The blade was bright. She made some passes in the air that Don had taught her. A bystander, seeing the two faces so close together, would have noticed how alike they were. She whistled a little as she put the room in order. At the door, she looked back at the portrait, and made the military salute.

"Thought you would be lonely. Are you all right?" asked Dr. Kent's voice outside the library window that evening.

Shirley answered immediately.

"David, if there be another world like this, come around sometimes and ask me that!"

David Kent colored up to the roots of his hair in the dusk.

"Did it answer? Shall you miss her?"

"Yes, it answered very well; and I shall miss her by and by, but just now — don't tell, David — I think I am rather relieved."

That same evening Mr. Gilmore sat in Dale's study. He had come to bring him a check for five hundred dollars toward the repairs on the church, he explained, surprised to see a quick change in the younger man's face. What was the matter? Hadn't he been generous enough?

Dale was nervous and showed it.

"Before accepting your check, I should like to ask you a few questions, Mr. Gilmore," he said. He drew from his desk a small blank-book filled with newspaper clippings, and studied it. The book had an aroma of tobacco; its pages were annotated in a large, straggling hand.

"You are president and part owner of the National Cotton Mills Company, trade mark 'Nacomico'?"

"Correct."

"About a year and a half ago," Dale continued, "the newspapers published interviews with you, saying that business was never better, and that the outlook was for an increased dividend in July. Do you remember it?"

"I may have said something of the sort at one time or another. Let me see; I didn't know you kept a scrap-book." Mr. Gilmore stretched his hand out for it.

"This scrap-book is not mine." Dale showed the page without relinquishing his hold. Mr. Gilmore looked at it in silence.

"On the strength of these interviews your stock

climbed several points higher," Dale went on, studying the quotations. "Then, not very long afterward, you came out with another interview in which you explained that affairs had grown dark, that the works were being run at a loss, and that the only way to prevent disaster was to shut down for a time, as if that did not spell disaster, — to the men!

"Your stock went tumbling down, two, three, five points at a clip. Nevertheless, while it was at its lowest, some one bought in block after block of it. Wall Street says that it was bought in for you; that you forced your workmen to suffer, and ruined other speculators, in order to make what the newspapers here call 'A Sharp Deal.' Is this the truth?"

"I can't see whose business it is how I run my own affairs," said Mr. Gilmore in a tone, not ill-natured, but unyielding.

"Pardon me; it becomes my business to know something about you as soon as you put yourself in relations with my church by offering it money. It is fair to a man to ask him to explain his ethical standards himself, when he is accused. If you can assure me that you did not buy the stock, and that there is no truth in the story, I will believe you."

He waited, his chin in his hand. Mr. Gilmore did not fidget as a weaker man would have done, but he flushed, if the slight suffusion around his cheek bones could be called a flush. He would have liked this young man to think well of him.

"Well, I did buy in some of it," he admitted. "It was in the market. You are not in business yourself; and you are not in a position to know anything about its fluctuations. A profit or loss of a cent may

make a huge difference with a big manufacturing business."

"That does not explain the discrepancy between your two statements," Dale objected. "It does not explain why you should know so little about your own business as to arrive at disaster so soon after your forecasts. The presumption is that you did know, that you deliberately manipulated the market in order to get an unfair advantage over others."

"There you're wrong," Mr. Gilmore interrupted, leaning on the desk. The lamplight shone full upon his massive head and bull-dog chin. "I wasn't aiming to 'get an advantage,' I was aiming to get the stock! The fellows that got left would have done me if they could; that's understood. Do you think I would have whined if I had lost? No, sir, I pay like a man. Rules of the game."

"And the pawns in the game? The sick children, the overworked women, the men who walked the streets hungry?"

The man opposite did not answer. He had indeed paid for relief out of his private pocket, but it sounded lame to say so.

"I cannot take your check," said Dale, reluctantly. "If you wish to help our church, give something else, — a humble respect for the rights of other men."

"Well, all I say is, if you are going to investigate the origin of every dollar that goes into your treasury, you had better begin with some of your own congregation."

"It is not my duty to investigate the origin of every dollar that goes into our treasury. If you had put money into the offertory plate, it would not be my

duty to try to ferret out the giver; but when you or any other man comes to me in private, and admits without compunction that his money has been won from others by tricks, I feel under no obligation to accept it."

"You show your want of common sense, then. Money is money, wherever it comes from."

"No, sir," said Dale, earnestly; "money is myself! My industry, my earning power, my credit with honorable men, or my greed, my prostituted ideals, my meanness!"

Mr. Gilmore raised his forehead, thrust out his lower lip, and sat so for a minute.

"You put it pretty strong," he remarked.

"Yes," said Dale, with a quick revulsion of feeling. Who was he to hold the standard before others, he whom loss of money embittered, to whom the larger setting wealth affords was ever a temptation? Was it not a little ridiculous?

Humor has its pitfalls, as well as the want of it.

"Do you mean to say that my dollar would not feed a hungry man as well as the next man's?"

"Certainly it would; but we are not speaking of feeding the hungry, but of sustaining the church. You seem to be laboring under a confusion of ideas. The Church of Christ is not a pauper, living on the unwilling doles of men who belittle its mission, and thankful to take anything it can get. The Church of Christ is a free agent. It stands for the kingdom of God and His social righteousness, and it is not in need of money so much as it is in need of principle."

"That is too high-flown for me," said Mr. Gilmore. "Sentiment comes cheap when there is no one to

underbid you, but it will not put a new roof on your chapel there, next time it leaks."

"In that case," said Dale, soberly, "we shall ask our young people to raise their umbrellas."

"Do you think they will be there to do it?"

"I trust so." But in his heart he was far from sure.

"Well, I'll not argy-bargy with you any longer," said Mr. Gilmore, good-naturedly. "Take it or leave it; it's all one to me. Mind, I think you are wrong. There is nothing personal about money."

"You think so? If your daughter had been enticed into some disreputable house, and the proprietor offered to share the profit of her being there, would you accept it?"

"I'd strike him dead!" Mr. Gilmore spoke in sudden passion, while the thick color mounted to his face. "How dare you mention my daughter in such a connection?"

"Because men have been known to do such things. Do you think Christ would? *Would you stand by and see Him take it?*"

His listener's eyes were fixed upon him as if fascinated. He looked both puzzled and shocked.

"If it were some one else's daughter?"

No answer. Mr. Gilmore's moist hand squeaked on the arm of the chair.

"If the man had no intention of giving up his traffic, but wanted to ease his conscience by a gift to the church? Do you think Christ would allow him to pay for protection?"

"Lord, you make me sick," said Mr. Gilmore. He took out his handkerchief, and mopped his forehead.

"I am only reminding you that we have to deal with a Person, not with a treasury. When will men see that financial immorality ranks with other immorality? Now I want to ask you one more question. If Jesus of Nazareth were in this room, knowing the source of every penny of your property, and ready to go out and die for you, — I do not say that He would not accept anything from you, — I ask you whether you would offer it to Him in the same offhand way that you have offered it to me?"

"I'm not much on heroics," said Mr. Gilmore, after an awkward pause.

"None of us are. We shrink from expressing our noblest emotions, and take refuge in slang. It is one of our national characteristics, and it keeps us this side of genius."

Mr. Gilmore looked around the study, with its dingy wall-paper and carpet. He noted its objects without contempt. He loved money, not for what it could buy, but for the power it gave him over other men like himself. In silence he tore the check into little pieces, and dropped them into the waste basket.

Dale opened the front door, and offered his hand.

"Perhaps I have spoken too freely, Mr. Gilmore. It would hurt me to think that I had been rude to any one in my own house. I have not," said the minister with a boyish air which sat well upon him, "had a house of my own very long."

"Oh, I'm not laying up anything against you," replied Mr. Gilmore. "I'm well accustomed to being pitched into. You'll have seen the cartoons in the Hawkeye? Their man has a rare talent; he does me in every contortion he can think of. Bless you, it

rolls off me like water from a duck's back. I'm that sort that, the more they hammer me, the more I don't give in."

Dale stood in the porch to cool his forehead. It was the same old fight between the tangible and the intangible, between the common sense which is America's idol, and the spirit which is truth. It seemed a losing fight, such was the reaction of the moment. The night stirred against him like a formless presence. He felt its breath upon him with yearning.

"Summer is over," he thought, "and now, to work!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CHRISTMAS Day. The village slept like a frozen village in a frozen basin. Columns of pearly smoke rose perpendicularly from the chimneys. The trees on the hillside exhaled a visible breath. That was from the warmth of the afternoon sun, shining with orange luster on the snow. Hard furrows were cut in the lonely road, where a dark figure, moving forward with hands in his pockets, was the only living thing in the landscape. It was the minister.

He had been to see Paul that morning, as the most isolated being of his acquaintance; and he was recalling the rough staircase between the main part of the house and the ell, the badly-lighted loft with its cold, heavy atmosphere, and the mummy wound into a dingy red quilt, sleeping noisily. Paul had crept into bed after his morning's work. He sat up and grinned in unqualified approval at the red necktie Dale proffered.

"You me to pay want?"

"No," said Dale, taken aback, "it is a Christmas present. Merry Christmas!" he repeated, desperately.

"Merry Krissmus," echoed Paul, to whom the jargon conveyed little meaning, for here were no processions, no vodka, only idleness and the prospect of turkey, which had made his heart glad on the last saint's day. Dale took a cake of soap from his pocket and signed to

him that he was to make himself presentable with it for the family dinner. Paul shook his head.

"I must to wash all the days before I to milk can. He wass to make me."

"Yes, but once isn't enough. Look, Sonny," and Dale held his well-groomed hand beside the other's. Paul laughed affectionately, and patted the hand. Dale had persisted. Paternal government, it might be; it was all the fellow understood, anyhow.

Then he had gone home to his solitary dinner. His desk was strewn with calendars. ("My, you've got them all, haven't you?" was Joanna's comment.) He could not help looking over his mail again, hoping against hope that there would be a package, a letter, a post-card even in the handwriting he seldom saw nowadays, to tell him that he was not forgotten.

No, nothing. And that was why Gordon Dale stood still in the road and brooded, with his head sunk on his chest.

"My fault; my own fault," he murmured.

Before him, in the narrow lane, was a cottage which had once been white. Its end wall showed a curious streak, like the shadow of a gaunt, leafless tree. One looked around involuntarily to see what tree could cast such a misshapen shadow, but it was not a shadow. Sam Foskitt, the village factotum, had once contracted to paint it for Granny Akers, and the paint had run short. She had refused to make up the deficiency, and Sam had revenged himself by leaving unpainted streaks, as fantastic as possible, down the middle of the end wall.

As Dale crossed the yard to the side door, a blue jay lit on the door-step. He rapped.

The door opened, and a little old weather-beaten woman stood on the threshold. She wore a faded blue dress of scanty cut, and a large black bonnet trimmed with ragged chrysanthemums which, from long exposure to wind and sun, had lost their original character as a decoration, while acquiring the dignity of a symbol. Both dress and bonnet were powdered with pine needles. The smell of them was in her hands. When she recognized her visitor, her strangely bright blue eyes twinkled, as if with the joy of approaching combat. The blue jay lifted his crest; the man his hat.

"Merry Christmas, Mrs. Akers," said he.

"Why, come in; you're welcome," she answered.

"If you're coming in again, William, you come now."

"Why 'William'?" asked Dale, as he stepped into a queer, low-ceilinged sitting-room, so walled in by evergreens that he felt himself in the woods.

"'Will' is too much like him; he's set on having his own way," said Granny Akers severely to the bird.

"No, you can't have any more to eat now; you stop hintin'."

William flew to his perch on a spruce tree standing in one corner, and cocked one eye at her saucily. Granny Akers seated herself on a low stool between two tall stone jars, which she was filling with green boughs, and went on arranging them with consummate skill, holding her head off to study the effect. She looked like a genial idol, squatting before a pair of temple vases.

"You haven't been round for quite a spell," she began. "I mistrusted your int'rest in me was only temp'rary!"

"Far from it."

"I dare say you've got some more int'resting heathen on the docket, and have given up trying to reform me?" (She looked rather curious to know if this were so.) "I'm too old to be reformed!"

"It is not a question of age, Mrs. Akers," said the minister, gravely.

"What is it, then?"

"It is a question of getting one's eyes so close to some one thing that we fail to see anything else."

"If you mean that I'd been going blind the best part of my life, till I got my eyes open to see what a splendid world this is, you're right. Tell you, that was my conversion; and I don't want no other. I've stopped doing just what other people does; I do what I want to. I can fix the flowers for weddings and funerals better than any one in this village; and I can charge 'em for it. I don't go to church any more, because I don't want to. So I'm a heathen and queer — it's the same thing in Waukomis — and you want to do me good. I don't want to be done good to!"

"I do," said Dale, unexpectedly.

The old woman cast a sidelong glance at him like an undecided hen.

"What's wrong with you?" she asked in a different tone.

"I am homesick!"

"Why don't you go home, then? Haven't you got any folks?"

"Yes." He regarded her somberly. "I do not think they want me."

Granny Akers fixed her bright blue eyes upon him for a moment without speaking, and then, stretching out a claw-like hand, patted his knee.

"Well, I want ye, then. We all have them blue times, and don't always want to tell what's behind 'em. Stay to tea with the old woman, and I'll make you comfy along o' my birds. Do you want to?"

"I'd jump at the chance."

The old woman cackled, much pleased.

"There! You can go on trying to convert me if it'll do you any good, or you can talk common sense. I got that Wordsworth from the liberry, as you told me. I sat up all one night to read his pieces. There's one about a girl I used to know, — her name was Lucy. When I come across it, it scaret me. He says she was fair as a star, when only one was shining in the sky, and not shining very bright because it wasn't dark . . . how did he know that? She's dead. She's been dead fifty years. There was a spring in her yard. We called it Dove Spring because of the pigeons. He's got that in, too. And he tells how he and his sister was boy and girl together, free and wild-like. 'I can't tell what I was,' says he, but he does, — how the waterfalls made him feel kind o' wild, and how everything was alive.

"They made me pay ten cents fine on that book. Land! they don't want it; it was all dust. I tell you what I do; I take it back one day, and go after it the next; they can't say anything to that."

"No need of doing that any longer," said Dale, and turning to his overcoat he drew forth a red volume and laid it in her lap. Her incredulous wonder was funny to see.

"For me? to keep? Why, I haven't had a present like that in I don't know when." She brushed the pine needles from her hands. "Here, you take it, my

hands are sticky, and read me that about Lucy." While he read she lit a lamp, and returning to her low stool sat motionless, her chin in her hands, and more like the idol than ever.

" 'And vital feelings of delight' — " continued Dale, when a shadow crossed the yard, and the outside door opened, letting in a rush of cold air.

" Who is it ? " called Granny Akers.

" Are there any lame ducks hopping around in there ? " called a voice in answer. " Speak before I step on them. Oh, how are you, Mr. Dale ? " and Shirley DeForest stepped into the circle of light. Her walking skirt cleared her ankles, and she wore a white gauze scarf tied over her soft felt hat. There was something careless, dashing, in her manner, as she flung off her white mittens, which was new to Dale.

The hand she gave him was cold, but it had a good grip. He had felt it that day when he hung over the Gorge, and ever since he had wanted to be a friend to Shirley DeForest if she would let him.

" Only William is here; it's his *morals* that's lame," said Granny Akers. " There, I've got about all I want for one day, with your coming."

" Take one thing more, you contented person ! "

" Suet for my birds. Nobody but Miss Shirley would have thought of that." Granny Akers fairly purred.

" She has them in here cold nights," Shirley explained, curling herself up in the big rocking-chair. " If I were a wee bit creature a few inches long, I should think it Paradise to creep into a shelter like this. I found your magazine propped up against my door when I came home this morning. It was good of

you to think of me. Why are we both roaming around to-day, I wonder?"

"‘The feast days of the many are the fast days of the few,’" he quoted.

Her surprised look was not only quick with fellow-feeling; it lacked that intangible reserve which he had felt so often. The sore spot was less sore. Suppose he were to say: "See, there are those who think me a lame duck . . . ?"

William had flown to the handle of the pump, where he uttered a conversational squawk.

"If you think you're going to be attended to one minute before the proper time, you're mistaken," said Granny Akers.

William cocked his head on one side, and looked at her with a bright, saucy eye. When she had poured a can of peaches into a glass dish, and started for the sitting-room with a loaf of cake in the other hand, he sidled in ahead of her, nipping her skirts at every step.

"Go 'way — let go! I never see such a pest as you be!" she ejaculated, while William flapped his wings and squawked.

"What does he want?" asked Shirley.

"Wants pop-corn. You ought to be ashamed, you logy bird, to ask for more." With ill-concealed pride she drew a handful from her pocket. "Here, take it."

Dale burst into a laugh that did him good. His mood had changed, and he enjoyed the contrast between the lamplit room and the snow-fields outside, for the curtains were not drawn.

"Take some cake, Mr. Dale. I sent some to Mrs. Prindle. She didn't eat anything one while but cold

oatmeal pressed in a mold, but now she's got Christian Science she eats everything, and more too. It's an easy religion for selfish folks; anything you want to do is right."

Dale smiled rather grimly.

"A lady in my first parish tried to prove to me that the world was a delusion. 'But what a comfort it is,' said she, 'to think that it is God who gives us the delusion!'"

"I had an acquaintance who went through the siege of Peking," Shirley remarked. "She wrote that 'cannon seemed to be firing, shells seemed to be bursting in the compound.'"

"Yes; and I suppose the bodies lying around outside seemed to be dead! Christian Science denies matter, and then uses its pseudo-philosophy for material ends. You can call disease disease, or you can call it error; but so long as you have to call it something it exists for you. If you call it error, you have no right to magnify that error out of all proportion to its place in the scheme of things. Health is not the object of existence. Life is the function of the universe!"

"Because folks get well on a notion it don't prove that their notion is true," said Granny Akers.

Shirley laughed. Dale turned his head quickly.

"How solemn you are!" she exclaimed. "Cannot you see that the whole thing is just a symptom of what David Kent would call a 'deficiency' of some element in the church itself? When it has learned to emphasize the power of one's thought-habit to create health or disease, there will be no further need of any separate cult."

"Then would you have us preach upon 'thought-habit,' as you call it?"

"Yes; sometimes."

"Write it here, please," and he handed her his notebook. She demurred, but he insisted. As she took the pencil the leaf fluttered over, and some words appeared in his fatally clear handwriting:

"Saturday. Snicklefritz again!"

The minister blushed a beautiful red brown, and turned over the leaf promptly.

"Oh! I did not know that was there."

Shirley looked up with tilted chin and eyes full of mirth. He was startled. It was the face of the photograph, sprung suddenly to life.

"Who is 'Snicklefritz'?" she asked.

"I shall not tell you," he answered.

They left the house at half-past nine. The ground was so white, the night so windless, that the gaunt trees showed their next season's leaf-buds in shadow on the snow. They were violet shadows, and a white moon rolled upward through violet space. Space and moon, snow and shadow made a world remote, like that other world remembered poignantly in dreams.

"How well I see!" thought Shirley. "Once I saw nothing clearly; I only felt. Now I observe; but I feel nothing. My life is so *strange*!"

"I forgot to say that I have got the four men for you," Dale began suddenly. "Paul brought the other three himself. It is perfectly simple to him. I have been his 'friend,' he thinks, so I must be a friend to the rest. 'John iss good man, buy farm one day,' he told me. When I think what the rest of us might do if we were only as simple and practical I groan. So much machinery, so little result. Will you teach them

English Sundays? I will have that basement room cleaned out for you. It is hardly better than a coal hole."

"Very well, I will try, though I am afraid I shall not know what to do with them."

"Mother them a bit. With your sympathies —"

"Oh, I am so tired of hearing about my sympathies!" said Shirley to herself. "Hasn't he found out yet how little they are worth? I want to care — they think I do because I see and imagine — but I feel nothing." She had a mind to say this aloud, but her mental reservation prevented. A forlorn spinster making a confidant of her priest! She was not reduced to that yet!

"I wonder?" thought Dale; "I wonder?"

An eerie call close at hand broke the silence.

"What was that?"

"An owl," said Shirley.

"Oh!" His laugh rang in the frosty air.

"Shall we try a glissade over this crust, Miss DeForest? Give me your hand." It felt warm through his thick glove. The tingle of the night had got into his blood. He drew long breaths from sheer enjoyment. He wanted to shout aloud.

"How young he is!" she thought.

"Will you come in?" she asked, as they reached her door.

"Just for a moment, to see that you are safe."

Shirley lit a lamp and placed it on a bracket. Dale put one foot, in its neat arctic, on the stove hearth, and looked at her kindly.

"Miss DeForest, do you know that it troubles me to think of your living here all alone?"

"I do not quite like it myself, but it is better than the alternatives."

"Could you not rent part of the house to some one?"

Her face stiffened into an expression of obstinate pride which he had learned to recognize.

"My cousin May would like me to rent it all, and take up work like hers in New York."

Dale looked at her rather consciously. His eyes were oddly dark and bright.

"How is Miss Dunham?"

"Well and busy, when she wrote last." Shirley spoke with some reserve. It had hurt her that May had gone home without giving her her confidence. That was her portion now, she told herself, — the confidence of other people.

"Miss DeForest, I have a confession to make to you."

"To me?"

"Yes, please. About your cousin. I want absolution. She was such a fine girl. She had nearly everything but humor. She made me think of that fellow in one of Maartens' novels, who wanted to be 'consciously doing good.' She was doing good consciously, and enjoying her sensations.

"I do not grudge her her sensations. I enjoy my own, sometimes, when I am not doing good! But . . . she seemed to have made the original discovery that a man is a human being, to be treated according to ethical principles. I am not anxious to be patted on the head as a human being; it is a little too obvious!

"I wanted to be friends with her, for we nearly went over that cliff together, and she was tremendously

plucky; and why she should have pitched into me so, that last night . . . all about my staying here, 'out of the World-Struggle,' as if I had picked out an easy berth for myself . . . no doubt she thought so! She spoke about some East Side mission or other; I don't know what she was driving at. Her superiority was so crushing that I had to rise up and do something, and so — "

"Well? "

"I kissed her."

"Ah! "

"It was horribly mean of me. I give you my word, I had not the slightest intention of doing it. I told her that she was a nice little girlie, and I had enjoyed studying her type. It was so fresh and young for her to be gathering data about life, when her own experience was a blank. I told her what women needed to-day was not more 'material,' but more emotion. I told her her crude ideas served to show what she had not learned, what she had not felt, what she had not experienced. I told her it would do her a world of good to fall in love. I believe I said a few more things."

"What did she say to that? " asked Shirley.

"She was — presumably — flabbergasted."

Shirley laughed.

"Possible? "

"I wish you would do that again! "

"Do what? "

"Laugh."

Her face changed immediately, seeing which he came nearer and offered his hand.

"I beg your pardon. I have wounded you."

"No," she answered, "I know that I have been

under a strain. I tell myself so, just as if it were some one else; and I do laugh very often, but not aloud. There is no one to hear me!"

He frowned in quick sympathy.

"What do you think?" he asked. "Do you believe that your family life goes on somehow?"

"I hope so; but it is all so different! They are gone!"

"If you think that change the worst, you know little of human misery," said Dale, sternly. "Have you ever seen deterioration? Have you ever watched human beings alter for the worse while you stood by and had no influence? If not, give thanks that you have been spared!"

Half-way up the street he remembered that he had held her hand all the time.

"'Pick them up and carry them,'" he repeated. "Dear old Griggs! I wonder what he is doing now?"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

MR. HITCHCOCK and Deacon Branch sat on one side of the study table, the minister on the other. He had been giving an informal talk Sunday evenings in place of the long second sermon, and they had come to inform him that some of the congregation objected. From the corner of his eye he could see four arctics in a row before the stove. Massive, impervious, they seemed to dominate the situation.

He listened patiently. He did not think that a longer sermon would necessarily benefit the hearers. Was not the demand for it due to a false conception of Sunday?

"A false conception?" inquired Mr. Hitchcock, with some asperity, while Deacon Branch writhed uneasily in his chair. As a member of the committee which had called Dale, he found himself in the position of an editor who feels compelled to disavow responsibility for his contributors' opinions.

"As a day to be got through with somehow; by the New York paper, a nap on the sofa, and another sermon to kill time. Frankly, I do not think that it is a pastor's business to kill time for other people; besides, there is too much to do."

"How long did it take you to write last Sunday's sermon?" asked Mr. Hitchcock.

If Dale had answered the whole truth he would have said: "All my life."

"It took me the best working hours of the week. Brethren, are we to rest idle because we have not the same conditions to contend with as in cities? Our church exists to build up the kingdom of God in Waukomis. What are we doing to build it up? If we realized the unfruitfulness of the average church, we should pray that our reproach might be taken away from us. I am trying to organize an afternoon Bible class in the schoolhouse over in Jericho."

"Tough set over there," the deacon suggested.

"Come with us," urged Dale. "Four of our young people are going with me. Drive over, next Sunday, and back them up."

"Why, I don't know about it," said the deacon, hesitating; "it's a pretty bad road for the horse!"

"To what did you refer," broke in Mr. Hitchcock, "when you said you had too much to do? We consider this a pretty easy place for a young man."

Dale had an inspiration.

"If you will meet me on the library steps at ten o'clock Saturday night, I will show you."

They were accordingly on hand a quarter of an hour before the time, and then blamed Dale for being late. When he came, he led them down to Regan's saloon, and bade them wait outside. A group of farm hands, with arms interlocked, were staggering up the hill to the spot where they had hitched their team.

"Pretty well loaded," observed Mr. Hitchcock.

"Outrageous!" assented the deacon, with a virtuous glow over the proper sentiment. The glow was short-

lived. Dale opened the door, and thrust some one upon them unceremoniously.

"Take charge of him; there are two to-night," he said, shoving forward a second youth who accepted his guidance passively. Not so their charge. He was in the colloquial stage, and greeted his unwilling guardians with a burst of noisy laughter.

"Hullo, Deacon! H'lo, Hishcock — you drunk, too? Thash ni — ish! Blind lead the blind; both fall in dish!"

"Hush! Be silent," said Mr. Hitchcock, angrily. "This is disgraceful!"

"Who's dishgrash? No dishgrash. Three of a kind beat two pair. Lemme esplain joke — esplain." He waxed pathetic over their inability to see the point. They could see it if they weren't drunk. They were drunk, that was what was the matter with them!

Dale led them half a mile down the Sweetwater road, and, stopping at a small cottage, bade the others keep out of sight while he held a short colloquy with the woman who answered his knock. It was the woman who "talked all over her face." There were sounds of tearful thanks.

"Now, gentlemen, you know your way, I think?" he said, returning. "Third house beyond the cross-road. I will bid you good night;" and leaving them to get out of the predicament as they could, he went home, and threw himself on the sofa, where Joanna found him when she came in with a glass of milk. She liked the errand, for Dale was affectionate between sleeping and waking, and would smile drowsily, saying, "good, kind Joanna," as now.

"Half-past eleven, sir. And, if I may arsk, where is Deacon Branch this evening?"

"The officers of the watch are on duty elsewhere," explained Dale, gravely; but when he had got up-stairs he made grimaces at his own face in the mirror.

For the officers themselves it was no laughing matter. They had to restrain their charge by force from sitting down in the middle of the road "to contemplate shtars." "Why won't you contemplate shtars?" he demanded, tearfully. Arrived at the house they were met by a virago with her upper teeth gone, who answered their dignified rebuke by telling them to mind their own business, and not give her or her husband any more of their jaw.

"A pretty kind of trick I call this," said Mr. Hitchcock, hugging himself more closely in his overcoat, as they took to the railroad track to shorten their walk home.

"I don't know as he knew who was going to be there," suggested Deacon Branch in extenuation.

"A minister of the Gospel ought to keep out of such places," said Mr. Hitchcock, shortly.

They had reached a spot where a bend in the river brought it alongside the track. The back of a long building, overhanging the water, loomed up indistinctly. It looked secretive. Posters were peeling off from the damp walls, the huge wheel, buried below, was silent. There was a faint reflection visible from the windows on the farther side, which held a sorry stock of groceries in cans and boxes. It looked a forsaken spot; yet as they passed they seemed to catch the twang of a violin. Deacon Branch edged nearer to his companion.

"There's some pretty queer doings at the old mill over there, if all they say is true," said he. "They say there's gambling going on, and they drive down nights from town. Have you heard anything about it, Hitchcock?"

No, Mr. Hitchcock had not heard. His tone was lofty, and implied a rebuke to the deacon's unbecoming curiosity.

Soon after this Dale called one evening on the rector of the Episcopal church, an elderly man in weak health, with a small parish and a smaller salary. Although he was in his way an earnest man, he had lost his initiative in his uncongenial surroundings. When Dale proposed that they should preach sermons on the same Sunday, denouncing the system which allowed Waukomis to be a supply center for all the no-license villages in the region, he shook his head doubtfully.

"It would be termed sensational," he objected. "You are young and enthusiastic, Mr. Dale. You have not been here long enough to learn who pull the wires. You can attack the morals of Waukomis and be forgiven, but take care how you attack their pocket-books."

"If that is the vulnerable point, it is the point to aim at," Dale answered. "We are too much afraid of being sensational. Jesus Christ used a whip to drive the money-changers out of the temple; accepted invitations and rebuked his host; and called the chief men of the church hypocrites and whited sepulchers."

"Yes, because He had the authority that perfect love gives: we have not."

"Then you will not support me?"

Mr. Seymour trifled with his pencil, while a thin flush settled around his cheek-bones.

"Heaven forgive me for hesitating," he answered.

"Yes, I will support you."

The sermons were quiet enough, but Dale believed in facts. He gave a great many facts, and some of them were startling. The two ministers' action was discussed at afternoon whists, as well as in the barber shop that served Waukomis as an informal club. On the Wednesday following, the Waukomis *Eagle* (a rather feeble bird), in an acrimonious editorial, suggested that if one of the reverend gentlemen had resided in their midst longer, he would be less hasty to run down a town second to none for prosperity, and advised both pastors to confine themselves to the "simple Gospel."

Dale replied by a short letter giving more facts. It did not appear; "crowded out that week," the youth in charge of the office informed him, with an uneasy smirk. As if by accident, the issue contained a long letter from a former citizen, eulogizing the village and its modern improvements. Incidentally, Dale learned that a considerable share of the *Eagle's* stock was held by Mr. Hitchcock. This gave him something to ponder over.

He refused to be beaten. He organized a Boys' Citizenship League. He had been wiser had he reinforced himself by another leader, but he was full of restless energy at this time, and had many irons in the fire. The sight of Billy Lemmon's freckled countenance with its milk-white teeth did him good. He bathed in some mountain brook and came away refreshed, whenever he was close to the boy. He was the sort of boy you wanted to hug; but the minister had read

that boys did not like to be "pawed over." He studied him. Suppose he had not been the normal boy himself, and Billy were to find it out? Then indeed he were undone.

And, all unseen, Billy's eyes followed him at times with a mute reproach.

It was an innovation not altogether liked when Dale, for the benefit of those aliens in the gallery, began to give out his texts in Polish as well as in English. He did more; he sent notes of his sermons to Miss DeForest a week in advance. He made Paul say words over to him until he had caught their sound.

"Look here, Paul; I want you to get hold of more of the fellows," he said once. Paul smiled, and patted his arm.

"Thass right. I bring more."

What suasion he used no one knew, but before long a certain seat in the gallery began to be known as "Polanders' Row."

"They — er — smell dirty," Mrs. Sutherland objected.

"The sanitary conditions in Palestine were far from perfect," said Dale.

"I beg your pardon?"

"There were a great many foreigners, and no germicides."

"Really, he does say the oddest things," said Mrs. Sutherland.

"The reason why the Church does not reach the masses, is because the Church as a whole does not want to reach them," said Dr. Kent, as he drove with Dale over the hills. "If all the unclassed and degenerate of this township — and there are more of them than

you would suppose — were to troop into church some fine day, do you think they would be welcomed? ”

“ Name some of them.”

“ Well, there is a low family down that road who throw poison ivy in their neighbor’s windows. The woman we just passed takes morphia; and in that red farmhouse over there is a bedridden old reprobate who has cheated every one who trusted him, from sheer love of deceit. He sends for me often, gloats over the expense to his kindred, and as soon as I am out of sight, throws his tablets behind the bed. If you were to hold his hand and talk religion to him, it would flatter his self-conceit like zinc ointment, but it needs blistering to do him any good.”

“ I can hardly go into his house unbidden, and apply a moral blister.”

“ No, but you can get inside of the case.”

“ Kent, I envy a doctor his right of way. People put themselves in his hands.”

“ Not always. There are cases that I would treat for nothing, if they would give me the chance. They are too proud, or they have the habit of endurance. There is nothing stranger in all life than the tendency to get habituated to morbid conditions. People get used to their diseases. They get used to their sins, too, I suppose; and if the medieval idea of hell were true it would defeat itself, because they would get used to their hell. Now, whenever I can shake a patient out of his acquiescence, I feel that I have gained a point.”

“ If you think of it, that was just what Christ did when He offered a disrupted society the idea of the kingdom of God.”

“ Pity it was lost, then.”

"It has not been lost, only obscured. Faulty as the Church is, it stands for brotherhood in social relations."

"In Waukomis?"

"Would you like to see Waukomis without it?"

"I can tell you this," said Dr. Kent; "the world of to-day is turning away from the Church to find brotherhood in some other form of organization. Whose fault is it?"

"May it not be partly that the unconventional thinker like you holds aloof?"

"I have no choice," replied the doctor, abruptly. "Just as long as the Church denies me the intellectual freedom which any other system gives me, and insists upon my using another man's words to gain admission into its fellowship, I am disqualified. Who were these dead and gone worthies that the terms which they used to express their own belief and experience should be forced upon me? Words are a terrible peril; they crystallize, and then men gabble them over without stopping to think what they mean. That the church which calls itself Christian should keep a Roman governor's name in its creed for nineteen hundred years, when his prisoner said that others were more to blame than he, and that even they did not know what they were doing, seems to me puerile."

"No obligation binds you to subscribe to a form of words which you do not respect. Creeds are the pitchers we carry to the spring; the question is not what their shape is, but whether they hold water."

"Well, some of them do not."

"Then find or make one that does; but don't go without water because you don't like the shape of the pitcher."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ONE February morning a woman walked from the railroad station up to Main Street. She might have been any age from thirty to forty, for she had the clear, colorless complexion that defies time. Her hair, of a very warm shade of chestnut, shone with a dull luster like copper in a dark place. Precisely in harmony with it were her brown cloth suit, her sable furs, and her velvet toque, the latter enriched by a twist of yellowish lace and pins of smoked topaz. She was not a beautiful woman; but she was that something else which draws men to shop doors, and makes street gamins turn their heads and stop whistling. The men who were lounging in Lutz' barber shop craned their necks to look out of the window as she passed.

"Who's that, Pons? Do you know?" asked one, stopping short in his occupation of trimming his nails.

Major Pons involuntarily straightened his old back, and stood at attention.

"No, sir, I do not; but I know one thing, — that's none of your Waukomis women." There was a spark in his faded eyes that spoke of regret for things he only knew from hearsay; the horse show, the boulevards, and some of those big actresses, by Jove!

The stranger's cold, light gray eyes saw them. Homage of that kind she had long been accustomed to, and judging by the downward curl of her wide,

thin-lipped mouth, she rated it at its worth. She appraised her surroundings in amusement.

"One gabled monstrosity, two old Colonial, three make-believe Colonial . . . Romanesque library . . . white meeting-house with green blinds, aged elm swathed in wire netting outside — quite idyllic."

Arrived at the head of the street, she turned the corner, and rang the bell of the first house. There was a sound within of a lumbering body approaching. Mrs. Purple opened the door a hand's breadth, and looked around it. When she saw a stranger she opened it a little wider, displaying her teeth in benevolent curiosity.

"This is not Mr. Dale's?"

"He lives next door," said Mrs. Purple, pointing, "but you won't find him home, unless he's come back the last few minutes. Did you want to see him?"

"Thank you, I have no doubt your information is correct," said the stranger, and was out of the gate before her hearer could determine how this speech was meant. With Joanna she made equally short work. She wished to see Mr. Dale on business; it was not necessary to announce her; she would go directly into his study. She pushed open the door, and, reaching behind her, shut it just as Dale, aroused by the slight sound, sprang to his feet.

"You!" he exclaimed, changing color.

"You look surprised to see me, Gordon," she said, advancing a step or two, but Dale did not come forward. He stood grasping the corners of his desk. There was no welcome in his face.

"Why have you come?" he asked.

"To see the scene of your labors. I believe that is the proper phrase, is it not? Will you be so good as to

offer me a chair, or shall we conduct the conversation standing? "

He bit his lip. She always managed to put him in the wrong. In silence he placed a chair not far from the stove, and returned to his desk. At the instant when his back was turned, her eyes swept him with a glance which would have annihilated space.

"So this is your study?" she began, looking around her. "It must have been furnished in sections by committees. Heavens, what a carpet! Brown centipedes on a raspberry ground, and not an inch of plain wall surface. You ought to have stipulated that this room should be done over."

"The chapel needed repairs, and I agreed to wait until next year about the parsonage."

"You would have had both if you had insisted. A disposition to be accommodating is not what a man is respected for in this sort of place, but business ability, and a sharp lookout for his own interests."

The least practical of men dislikes to have his business ability called in question. Dale was silent. She went on:

"Your *bonne à faire tout* looks as if she were better acquainted with doughnuts than with pictures. That Tissot hangs crooked." Going over to it she straightened it, and moved about the room, giving a deft, careless touch to hangings and ornaments, while her eyes noted everything the room contained, which was perhaps her object. Afterward she seated herself on the opposite side of his desk. Rather nervously he shifted the scattered leaves of his sermon, in order that the sentences he had just written might not fall under her eye.

"Some thin muslin curtains at those windows would soften the light, and keep the street from staring in. I will make you some if you like."

"Thank you, I do not require anything at present."

"I have plenty of time on my hands. Our dear Bobby shows such fondness for my society that I am hardly ever able to leave him."

He threw up his hand with a quick gesture.

"Don't! Speak of him with some regard, or —"

"Or not at all, you would say. It strikes me that it is you who should be accused of want of regard. You have not asked how he is, yet."

He colored, and lowered his eyes.

"How is he?" he asked, as if the question were dragged from him.

"About the same. Like other spoiled children, more exacting than ever."

As he answered this by a haughty silence, she drew nearer and rested her arms on the desk. Against his will he admired the repose of her folded hands, unbroken by a movement. She had no little airs. She was that more dangerous force, a woman of self-control.

"You were wrong, Gordon, not to try to make a friend of me."

He answered after a moment's pause.

"I do not think it possible for you and me to be friends."

"That means that you prefer to have it otherwise?"

Again he considered his words, as if speech of any sort were difficult.

"Friendship does not mean the same thing to me that it does to you. It means truth, loyalty. You have not been loyal. You have not been true."

"I was under the impression that your religion warned against self-righteous judgments of others," she suggested, icily.

He winced at that.

"If I have seemed to judge you self-righteously, I must ask your pardon."

"For seeming?" She smiled quietly, and the smile was a sneer, yet it gave a fascinating glimpse of large, strong teeth. "As you will, only remember that the responsibility for the situation lies with you. I stand ready to meet you on amicable terms, or shall we say, neutral ground? Perhaps I could do more for you than that, if — I am not without power."

"I am aware of your power. Do not boast of it here." He was losing his grip of himself, and she noted it with satisfaction.

"Nevertheless, I repeat that it would be better for all concerned if you could let personal grievances sink into the background, for the present."

"Is he worse?" asked Dale quickly, in an altered tone.

"No, he is not worse. He is likely to remain as he is for an indefinite time, the doctor says. You see you have no need to accuse me of want of truth. I do not stoop to finesse with you. If I did, you would find me out. You have keen perceptions in some ways. That is where you are at war with yourself. Your idealism shrinks from seeing things as they are; and you dislike me because I have perceptions of my own, and can see your struggle. It is you who are not true. What is the use of trying to put a gloss upon life? Selfishness is the mainspring of human conduct. When it calls itself by other names it is merely refining itself. We

have our erratic impulses, but they are not what keeps the machine going! Bobby likes me because I amuse him. I pet him and keep him good-natured, because it is for my interest to have him contented. You are in the ministry to please yourself — ”

“ No. ‘ Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.’ ” He stopped, for he could not bear to show his deepest feelings to this woman. The torture of it was that he could not hide them, for she challenged them continually, in pure mockery, he thought. So little we know.

“ And these smug Pharisees, zealous for tradition, whom you preach to? Do not flatter yourself, my dear boy, that you can change them. They hardened in their mold long ago. They do not want to be more spiritual. They get on better with themselves as they are. If a Christ were to walk their streets they would not know him. And you are no Christ.”

Her tone played over him as light and keen as a Damascus blade. He recoiled from it, and from the words.

“ You are stiff-willed, you like money. Oh,” at something in his look, “ you are no money-worshiper, I concede that; but you like ease, and freedom from common wants and worries. You hate to haggle over details. You like distinction. Never fear but you will have it, according to village standards. Member of the library committee, of course; leader of a Shakespeare class of No-More-Youngs!” She laughed, and he reddened. “ And the rest will tell you that your sermons are ‘ beautiful,’ and reck but little of it. It wants a one-sided man to fit into that groove! You are not one-sided enough. You are not dull enough. A man of

less refinement would not mind surroundings like these;" she waved her hand at a calendar strung on ribbons and displaying an open Bible and an anchor on each leaf. "You will waste your strength in conscious endurance. It bores you at times. You look on at yourself. You are divided against yourself. Do you think they will understand? Not one of them will understand."

Into her voice had crept a subtle sympathy which meant: "But I—I understand!" It made him feel impotent, exhausted. It paralyzed him. He rallied all his power against it.

"Be it so," he replied. "God can use even such as I am. You know well how to put your finger on a man's weak spots! Did you ever try to touch his strong ones? Those who look for souls find them. I have found them here. Your creed is a hideous one. It belongs to a perverted nature, ever trying to make others like itself. I do not ask how your nature became perverted. I have seen what your influence has been. I will not speak of the wrong you did me—you have admitted that I am not a money-worshiper—but the wrong you have done him can never be atoned for!"

She propped her chin in one hand, and, reaching across the desk, laid the other on his arm. It was a firm, not unwomanly hand. Many men would have been glad of its touch. Dale resisted it the more because it was pleasant.

"You are mistaken; I have done him no harm," she declared. "He is just what he always was; only, you were a boy, and you idealized him. He was the same then as now. If there has been any change, the change is in you."

"What evil genius was it that saw those tendencies,

and watched over and fostered them?" he broke out, losing his self-restraint at last. "If you cared for him, if you had ever cared for him, I could forgive your influence. I do not believe that you ever loved anything. You are a woman without heart — callous, inhuman. You have experimented on him as a bacteriologist experiments with his cultures . . . it has amused you! If I were a gentleman, I should not even speak of him to you; it is disloyal. He was —"

His voice betrayed the revolt of a proud spirit against hateful associations. He broke off, abruptly, and strode to the window. One hand was clenched behind his back. He remembered that she could see it, and shifted his position. If he could have seen reflected in the glass the gaze she fastened upon him, it would have startled him. But she was unlike most women in that she said nothing at all. And when he was master of himself enough to turn around, it seemed in the reaction of the moment as if their positions had somehow become subtly reversed; as if she had been the one to accuse, and his conscience had not been able to reply. So it had happened before.

She had taken up her sable muff, and stood, a tall, graceful woman with coppery hair and wide mouth turning down at the corners like a child's.

"You are going?" he asked, awkwardly.

"Yes."

"Will you not have some luncheon?"

"No, thank you. Not while you hate me."

Her voice was even. Dimly he felt that if she had been any other woman he would have called her eyes sad — weary. Yet what had she to be sad about? She had had her will! He had never trusted her; he never

would, thank God. If only he did not feel her power so much; if only it were not so hard for him to resist! But he would fight it to the end.

He locked his door, and sat down on the sofa, his head bowed forward on his hands. He was as exhausted as if he had done a hard day's work. Ah, she knew so well how to take the heart out of a man!

"God! Thou knowest my weakness. Be more real to me," he pleaded.

But what he did not know was that, when she had taken her seat in the train, she drew a scrap of torn paper in his handwriting from her muff.

"He is not in love yet," she thought.

She gazed at his writing hungrily.

"If I had ever had anything I wanted," she said to herself, "I should have been a good woman."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"SHE wa'n't his mother; she was too young for that," was Mrs. Purple's dictum.

"Or his aunt?" suggested her crony, Mrs. Branch.

"No, she didn't look like anybody's aunt. I tell you, there was something strange about that woman. Looking me over, with her teeth showing, as if she was laughing, though there wa'n't anything to laugh at."

"I always thought he was keeping something secret," Mrs. Branch remarked. "Why don't he tell where he goes, when he goes out of town? Sam Foscitt saw him take the New York train last time."

"Some say he goes to see that girl that was here last summer. He ain't paying attention to any one here."

Mrs. Branch lowered her voice, and looked mysterious.

"Loreena, did you ever think there might be a reason for that?"

The mean little wrinkles that made a fine network in Mrs. Purple's countenance sprang into relief. The change made her hideous.

"Maria, you don't mean to say —?"

"I say nothing," answered Mrs. Branch. "I make no accusations. All is, young men often have a past; and when it's a minister of the Gospel, you want to know what that past is."

This opinion she aired at the next meeting of the missionary society, unaware that Mrs. Lemmon was standing behind her. For that handsome matron she had an uneasy dislike. A newcomer, and an old maid before she married, to be president, and insisting that business be done according to parliamentary law, — as if a ladies' sewing society had anything to do with parliamentary law!

"Speculation, ladies, idle speculation," said Mrs. Lemmon, brightly. "All of us have a skeleton somewhere, but there is no need to rattle its bones. If we are upright ourselves that is the main thing."

"It isn't upright to conceal things," Mrs. Branch persisted.

"That depends upon what is concealed."

"Some people ought to be above suspicion," hinted Mrs. Purple.

"And some people ought to be above suspecting," Mrs. Lemmon retorted.

Meanwhile, Dale was wondering what had got into his people, and why conversation ceased abruptly at his approach. It had not taken him all these months to learn that the men were worse gossips than the women, and that reputations were picked over in the little stores in Market Street, but why did the young women of his Bible class look at him with that unholy — yes, that was the word — unholy curiosity? It seemed to say: "You may not be as good as we thought you were; how interesting!" What was the matter?

It remained for him to get his enlightenment through Billy.

"You needn't be so soft on the minister," said Zeph Branch, as the boys went home from school. "He's got

a wife and family somewhere, Ma says. She says he's ashamed to tell."

"It's a lie!" shouted Billy, swelling like a turkey.

"Nup. They'll have to have a meeting of the committee over it, Ma says —"

He got no farther, for Billy, the tender-hearted, the "Sissy," who walked around potato bugs in the road because he "didn't want to step on 'em," made a flying swoop and seized Zeph by the nose. That member being regrettably flat, he simply had to twist it to keep his hold. The twist told.

"Say it again!" he challenged, in a voice that broke pitch, — a thing which had happened lately to worry him; "say it again, if you dass!"

"Ba said . . . leggo! leggo! Ouch!"

"You've got to fight now, Billy," said the bystanders, seeing red.

"I'll fight the whole lot of you. Come on!" roared Billy, like a lion.

When the brief combat was over, Zeph was crying in the snow. Then Billy, in contempt, shook off the fawning crowd that would fain have followed him home.

"You needn't come hanging on me now, just because I've licked him; I don't want your company. You'd better go home, all of you," said he, and, sore from the kicks he had taken against rules, and with a sorer heart, he marched up the long hill.

"How did you get your face scratched?" inquired his father, sharply.

"Oh, just a scrimmage," Billy answered, impatient of adult curiosity.

"Let me see it. You haven't been fighting, have you?"

"Yes, sir, I have. And I'd do it again, too!"

"Stop! I'm ashamed of you. I never thought a boy of mine would go into the prize-fighter business."

"Well, I guess it would be some time before I got a prize," said Billy. "Zeph Branch has got to learn a few things. He's too fresh."

"Oh, it was Branch's boy, was it?"

"Ay-up. I've smashed his old punkin nose for him. You ought to have seen it run!"

"There, there, you mustn't talk so! Bled some, you say, Billy?"

"Like a squirt!"

"Strange," said his father, "how all the Branches had those papery noses. It was just the same with his father, and he made capital enough out of it, too! Well, if you had reasonable provocation, that alters the case; but I'm sorry you had to hit him."

"Now, Nathan, what is the use of our pretending?" said a richer voice. "Billy knows us. He knows we're glad. I don't care what it was about, I am glad you thrashed him, Billy, — and you must never do it again!"

"I sha'n't have to, Ma," said Billy, and made his escape. Mrs. Lemmon sat down on the arm of her husband's chair.

"You worry too much about that boy, Nathan. Because he does not make a fuss about his own rights you think he lacks spirit; and then when you find that he knows how to use his fists you don't wait to learn the cause, you are so afraid he has done wrong. You wouldn't want him to be like some of the boys who

act as if their father and mother were natural enemies; but because he is more sweet and affectionate than ninety-nine in a hundred you are afraid he is going to be a girl-boy."

Whenever his wife entered the room, Mr. Lemmon felt that he was going to have some fun. He had had this comfortable feeling ever since he was married.

"I want him to turn out different from me," he answered. "I've suffered enough from being awkward and absent-minded. I'd like to save him from my mistakes."

She patted his shoulder.

"Don't worry about him; he will turn out right. I know boys. They make great beginnings without knowing where they will come out, and act as full of self-conceit as a penny balloon, just because they are not sure of themselves. They don't ask questions, because they think they are the first to wonder about things, and they want you to understand how they feel, but not if you have to be told. It takes a long tether and plenty of trust to bring up a boy. Wait, Nathan; don't go in with the coal-hod yet; let him be alone a bit; he is upset about something."

"What makes you think so?"

"I saw it as soon as I came in."

"Some women can see through a barn door," observed Mr. Lemmon.

The dusk hid Billy's red eyes as he stood at the window, watching the constellations wheeling into view. "I don't believe it," he thought; "he is good, I know he is good," and more was at stake than the minister's good name. For there is a time when a boy's faith is

pinned to some older man, and if he loses it his stars go out.

"Ah, there you are," said his stepmother, coming up to put her arm through his. "Isn't it glorious?"

"That pink bow in your hair is awfully pretty, Mother. Mr. Dale likes pink. I wish you would wear roses in your hat."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Lemmon to herself.

"I shall wear roses in my hat, Billy, when you take honors at college."

"Do you think I shall — take honors?"

"Of course you will," she assured him.

Next day, Mrs. Lemmon drove into town with her husband. As they came in sight of the village, he uttered an exclamation.

"There!" said he, "I forgot my watch. I meant to have it cleaned."

"Shall we go back?"

"We sha'n't have time before the bank closes." Mr. Lemmon thrust his hand inside his coat, and, drawing forth the watch in question, consulted it. "Twenty minutes past two; no, there will not be time to go back for it."

"Nathan Hale Lemmon! That's your watch; you have it on this minute."

"Why, so I have," said Mr. Lemmon.

Mrs. Lemmon rang the parsonage bell. Dale jumped up to greet her as she entered the study.

"Mrs. Lemmon, I am very glad to see you."

"Mr. Dale," said Mrs. Lemmon without preamble, "are you a married man?"

"Certainly not," he answered, in amazement.

"I knew it," said she. "I knew that if I asked you

suddenly like that you would answer. There is a rumor about that you are either married, or tangled up in some way, and I think it is time to put a stop to it."

"I am neither married nor entangled. Such a rumor has no excuse," said Dale, sternly.

"Rumors do not wait for excuses. People are saying that you had a strange visitor here not long ago."

"It is true that a —" he hesitated a moment — "a lady called upon me one day, and went away afterward by train. Are such commonplace incidents regarded as compromising in Waukomis?" His tone was sarcastic.

"Not in themselves; but Sam Foskitt picked up a baggage tag that she dropped, and he says it had 'Mrs. Dale' written on it in pencil."

Dale leaned his head on his hand, thoughtfully; his face had altered. "I wonder if Linda did it on purpose?" he thought.

"I see; and I suppose you wish me to explain."

"No, I came to ask you that one question; that is enough. There are other Dales in the world. Who they are is of no consequence to me."

"Thank you."

Something in the tone made her ask quickly:

"You are taking this to heart?"

"It seems to me," said Dale, "that I have been here long enough now for my people to have made up their minds whether I am an honest man or not."

"That is true; but — have you ever lived in a village before?"

"No, and I have never lived in an aquarium, but it is the same thing; we devour one another for want of

natural food. I do my best to arouse more world-sympathy, but we are too self-centered; we need broader interests."

"Ah, Mr. Dale, you are young!" she exclaimed. "What they want is something to love!"

"Why don't they let themselves go, and love something, then?"

"Because they are afraid of what people will say. You don't understand, do you?"

"I must try to understand," he said, with determination. He was sorry when she rose to go, for her presence in the room was as cheering as the sun.

"Billy has been eating his heart out over the reports. He has not told me, but I know. He makes a hero of you; more than you know, perhaps."

"Billy is a trump," said the minister, a little huskily. "I wish he would come down to spend a night with me; it would do me good."

"He would be delighted."

So Billy appeared, the next afternoon, with a brown paper bundle very knobby at one end, and tied with as many knots of string as if it were his kit for a voyage. The sight of Dale's military brushes and a pair of neat boot-trees in a corner fired him with new ambitions. There were waffles for tea, and he was so distracted between the pleasant duty of eating as many as possible with a proper deportment, and keeping up his end of the conversation when his mouth was not full, that his cheeks were geranium red, and the top lock of his hair stood up stiffer than ever. Joanna made excuses to linger in the dining-room.

"It does sound good to hear talking in there," she

thought, for the minister generally ate his meals with a book propped on the table. He had not realized before how much he wanted companionship. If some one were always opposite . . . some one who wore soft, frilly things, and had a low laugh, and made unexpected speeches?

"What were you saying, Billy?"

"I said the wind was rising."

"It sounds cozy, doesn't it? Will you have something more?"

Billy surveyed the table, and showed the tips of his white teeth with candor.

"Well, I don't see as there is anything more to have!"

Dale laughed.

"That invitation was E. F."

"What is 'E. F.'?"

"Empty Form."

"Oh!" said Billy.

"Mother said I was to study where I wouldn't bother you."

"There is plenty of room on the other side of the table;" but Dale had forgotten how a boy studies. While Billy humped himself over his algebra, with his feet squeaking on the rounds of his chair, he wrote undisturbed; but after a time distressed breathings like corks being taken out of bottles, champings, and snortings came from the corner where Billy, his teeth clenched and his fingers in his ears, ironed the seat of the chair with restless movements as he wrestled with Roman history. Dale glanced that way; Billy was oblivious.

"I suppose I whiffled and burbled, too," he thought,

drawing a book toward him. The wind wailed outside; the fire purred and slept.

At nine o'clock he got up to poke it, and Billy came to kneel beside him on the rug. Dale never knew how it happened. He found himself making a clean breast to the boy of his dreams for the church, for the church as it must be, as he must spend himself to make it. He appealed to Billy to help him; he needed him; he wanted him! When he had finished, Billy's eyes looked at him in mute reproach.

"I've been hoping for ever so long that you would ask me," he said.

"Have you?" said Dale, and put his arm around him. He was shy of doing this, for he was not sure he would like it, but Billy snuggled up to him at once, and the minister learned then that, for generalizing purposes, all boys are divided into two classes, some boys, and other boys.

"Forgive me, Billy. I ought to have known. Next time I will try to help a fellow sooner, and not keep him waiting so long."

"That's all right," said Billy.

And so the minister found the beginning of his ideal community where it began first, in the heart of a boy.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE next week, at the close of the mid-week service, Dale rose, hymn-book in hand, and stood in silence until the congregation began to wonder what was coming.

"I understand that a rumor has been circulated among you that your pastor is secretly married, or entangled in some way. I wish to say that I am neither married nor entangled. Does any one present wish to ask me any questions?"

There was a tense pause, and the sound of feet drawn uneasily over the carpet, but no one turned or spoke. Dale waited, unaware that his lip curled. His eyes were dark with scorn. Anything but this, this miserable small-mindedness.

"Let us sing, 'The church's one foundation,'" he said.

"That is all very well, but who was she?" Mrs. Purple persisted.

Just at this time Dale began to feel that some influence was working against him. It was nothing he could lay hold of, nor could he say whence it emanated; but like an impalpable wall around him it baffled his efforts. He kept his own counsel, all unconscious that the outlines of his sermons, which he faithfully posted each week to Miss DeForest for her Poles, were telling her something of his struggle. She had grown

indifferent about herself, and saw the more for that. Would Waukomis get the better of him? She hoped not. His brief, impersonal notes gave her an unobtrusive sense of companionship, and she liked it. For Shirley knew that to most people she was that pitiful creature, a former beauty who has not succeeded. If she had married Dick Sutherland, and gone to live in the house with the glass veranda, they would have had more respect for her. Poor Dick, how they would have bored each other!

It was the height of such season as Waukomis could boast. The Women's Club sipped the sweets of literature (with a large "L"). Dale had once been ushered into the midst of an afternoon bridge party just in time to hear excited voices quarreling over the score. He looked in vain amid these conventionalized doings on a small scale for the nameless, irresponsible charm that makes society. He did not hold aloof from them, however. He was on his way home from Mrs. Sutherland's "reception," which had created many heart-burnings, when he ran into Dr. Kent at the gate. The doctor breathed heavily like a tired man. His hair straggled across his forehead, and the arm he stretched out for a light had a smear of dried blood on the sleeve.

"Why all this splendor?" he inquired.

"Mrs. Sutherland has a reception."

"Oh, I remember now; Ada went. I was thinking it was yesterday. I have been in different scenes. You know that gambling-den on the Jericho road, they call the 'Old Mill'?" There had been a brawl there, he explained between the puffs of his cigar. A man had been stabbed in the neck, and would have bled to death before his coming, if one of the girls, who had her wits

about her, had not pressed her thumbs into the wound. He could see her now, a scared, rabbit-faced thing with hair scalloped over one ear, and her silk waist spattered with blood. The place was like a shambles. McCarthy had really got a bad fright this time.

"The man may pull through. If he had died, there would have been an investigation, and the place might have been cleaned up; but that was not what I came for. Do you know what they hint at down there? Do you know who they say owns that shanty?" He leaned forward, and said one word in the other's ear. Dale recoiled with loathing.

"I cannot believe it!" he said, but something told him that it was true.

"He has been a sly fox, if the rumor is true. I do not think the sale was ever recorded. It is too soon to confront him with it, unless one had more proof."

"No," said Dale, sharply, "it sickens me! I will not go to a member of my church and accuse him of such a thing as this without absolute proof," and, with a sudden impulse, he reached his arm up to the other's shoulder, in a gesture which said more than words.

"Old fellow!" said David Kent, in the tone his patients heard when they were dying.

Some time in Mid-Lent, the Gilmores returned to Waukomis in their Panhard, bowing right and left like royalty as they went through the street. The same evening Ruth dashed unceremoniously into Shirley's kitchen.

"What are you doing, Shirley DeForest, — blacking the stove? Give me that bag thing for my hand, and let me try."

"In that tan coat?"

"I'll take it off. It is such fun to do something real! I had to exceed, evade, erump — I'm tired of being on the fence! You know — waiting to be asked to come down and play with the nice little girls in Society. I'm not going to wait to be asked. I don't want to play in their yard. If they would play in mine, the few I like, that would be different. Mamma smiles and smiles, and then comes home and cries; and Virginie brings her cups of tea. I wonder what she thinks of us. She's the kind they call inscrutable, like a rubber doll. How is everybody? How is Hamlet?"

"Mr. Dale is working hard. Why do you persist in calling him Hamlet?"

"Fancy the hamlet with Ham left out! I do admire that sententious way he has of saying, 'Yes,' 'No,' it's so final. Any matrimonial intentions yet?"

"I am not in his confidence about his intentions."

"Wait awhile. He'll come to you beforehand to talk it over. They all do, don't they?"

"It's a horrible bore," said Shirley, rather crossly. Ruth laughed till the room rang.

"Oh, it's so lovely to be sympathetic!" she cried.

Almost at the same hour Dale encountered Mr. Gilmore at the post-office. "Well, have you had to raise your umbrellas yet?" was his question, after the first greeting was over.

"We are patched up," said Dale, dryly. The money had been laboriously "raised" by ways he was not proud to recall. He was well aware, also, that his people would have called him a fool for not using the check to save their own pocketbooks.

"Where's your Pole?"

"Which one?"

"Lord! have you got a regiment?" asked Mr. Gilmore.

He invited Dale to dine with them next evening, and he accepted. He found himself in a many-windowed hall giving upon a loggia at the back, which framed, as it were, a series of pictures of dusky sky, the snake-like gleam of water, and the mysterious cone of The Torch. That end of the hall was left to the starlight, but in the middle a huge lamp glowed under iridescent glass, and the family rose to greet him from their seats around the fire.

"Here's where we sit," said Mr. Gilmore, pushing a chair nearer; "this is the heart of the house."

The decorator had known his business. Everywhere was clearness of intention. The very rugs had been chosen to complete the scheme. Near him was a jar of Richmond roses sent from the city by express that morning. The family treated these details *en bloc*; they never puttered. Dale's nerves were soothed. Not the costliness, but the harmony of his surroundings appealed to him. Should not such harmony be the daily portion of those who strove for the world's betterment?

He found himself seated presently at the table, with Ruth's insouciant face opposite. The girl had changed very much. She had lost some of her school-girl ways, and carried herself with more aplomb. The clear blue eyes, however, were as fiercely candid as ever.

"You will have to find something for idle hands to do, for I am going to stay up here all the spring," she announced.

Dale smiled, thinking how pretty she had grown. She overdressed at present. There was too much lace on her marvelous blouses.

"We have a class of little girls just out of the primary department." He had quite forgotten their former skirmish, but she had not.

"Thank you, no. That is not in my line, as you were good enough to inform me once. Haven't you any snuffy old people? I can't do them good, you know, but I can poke them up, and give them a good time. Cranks and idiots always take to me."

"Ruth!" murmured Mrs. Gilmore.

"I can give you a list as long as my arm," said Dale, off his guard. Mr. Gilmore laughed.

"I'll warrant!"

"I ought not to say that —"

"Oh, don't spoil it!" Ruth exclaimed. "This is not Waukomis, it is Liberty Hall, and we say what we like, not what we think we ought to say. You would be quite a companionable person if you were not so discreet. I hate discretion!"

She refused to take him seriously. Dale felt that it was not to be endured. No better counter-irritant could have been found. A new era began for him with those spring days; he began to play. Ruth joined the Home Department, and took Miss Nelie Prindle, holding her feathered hat on with one hand and wearing an expression of strained self-complacency, in her runabout to pay visits. She left it standing at Dale's curbstone in complete indifference to gossip; dropped her Du Barry scarf on his sermon; interrupted his work. He had grown too wise to ask ladies to meet in his study, for he could not send them home.

Nor could he send Ruth home, but — it was different.

"I've come to report," she would say. "It is the gloomering Ebbitts this time."

"That old lady is my despair."

"Because you don't know how to treat her," said Ruth, patronizingly. "When she tells me how her relatives have abused her, I tell her I know a lot worse things about people in New York, and she is so interested she forgets to gloomer."

Dale looked nonplussed at this original treatment. Ruth dropped him a courtesy with a mocking simper.

"What snake shall we look up for next Sunday?" she asked.

It became his habit to dine with the Gilmores once or twice a week. He blamed himself for feeling more at home in their atmosphere than his own people's. After a time, however, he found that their common territory was equally limited. He met them on their ground; they did not meet him on his. When he discovered this he stayed away. Then Mr. Gilmore came over to smoke in his study.

"Why weren't you around, the other night?" he asked.

"I have arrears of study to make up," began Dale, but the older man persisted. "Come to-morrow," he urged, and Dale, reading ennui in his look, yielded; and so he found himself once more with Ruth.

Her girlish passion for Shirley DeForest was as marked as ever. She talked about her to him.

"She told me once," said Ruth, "that girls were thrust out into society before they knew anything of life. If they were everyday girls they did not have

such a hard time; but that she was very sorry for girls who were beautiful or unusual, for they had too much emotional excitement, and made mistakes, and sometimes all they saved out of the wreck was the memory of moments when they had tried to be kind.

"Of course," she went on, "she could not have been thinking of herself, for she is always kind. She says it is a privilege to be able to understand people. Once I met a man in Washington who was in the diplomatic service. He was quite old, forty at least. He heard me mention Waukomis, and asked me if I knew Miss DeForest, if she was married. I told him about her, and do you know, his eyes actually filled, and he got up and went off without a word."

Her forget-me-not eyes were bright with tears. Dale dropped his own. A sudden thrill went through him, so sharp and quick that it was like a lightning flash revealing his own soul. He sat tongue-tied.

As soon as he could, he took his leave, and walked home in the strangest mixture of feelings. The young leaves made a soft blur against the April sky. Had the witchery never been there before, or was it this new thing in himself that sharpened every sensation?

What a lot of babble he had talked all his life! He had been a child, thought as a child. Now he was a man. Now he knew what love was. It was a door beyond, in the dark, *one* door, and no other. That was what love did for a man . . . put him at another's mercy. If the door would not open? If he had no right to ask? For there were things in the background, and they hurt him. But, oh, what did anything matter on this one night, but to let his heart have its way? To-morrow

there would be time for second thoughts. To-night, let him love!

Joanna found him asleep in the library next morning, his head pillowed on the arm of his chair. There were moments when he felt that he was looked after too well.

"You been here all night, Mr. Dale? You aren't sick, are you?"

"Not in the least," he answered, in a ringing voice, and bounded up-stairs, two steps at a time. Half an hour later he came down more soberly. Second thoughts had got hold of him. They continued to torment him during the days that followed, but they could not hinder him from leaning back in his chair and giving himself up to the luxury of dreams. When he met Ruth and Miss DeForest on the street together, he blushed as a man does, with an extraordinarily vivid look and a quick flash of the eyes. Shirley, the looker-on, caught the look. She prided herself a little on her insight. One must have something to feed on. She understood his warm manner, the overflow of larger feelings.

"Ah, yes, he will be over now to talk of her," she thought, with an inward grimace. They all treated her as if she had no life of her own. Well, why not? It was true.

After that, Dale gave up dining out, pleading study as his excuse. He was at his desk one evening when he heard a timid ring of his door-bell. Going to the door himself, he opened it, and saw a woman's form, wrapped in an old golf cape, cowering at his threshold.

"Myrtie? Come in," said he, pleased, for she had never come to him before; but when she had braced herself on the edge of a chair, shrinking away from the

light, he perceived that she was panting as if she had been running, and that her face was drawn and white.

“What is it?” he asked, in an altered voice.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"MR. DALE, I can't tell you!" she burst out, desperately. "I thought I could, but I can't. It isn't respectable!"

"Myrtie," he answered, "you can tell me anything. I do not care whether it is respectable or not. What is it?"

Silence, while she twisted her fingers together under her cape.

"They won't let me alone," she whispered, so low that he could barely hear.

"Who will not let you alone?"

"One of them works in the dairy," said Myrtie, reluctantly. "I used to know the other some when I was — a little girl. They try to come to see me. I can't stand the way they speak to me! They give Joey candy, and he cries when I take it away from him. They're always hanging around. I'm afraid!"

"It shall be stopped," said Dale, in indignation. "Scoundrels, to molest a woman! I will see to it myself. Tell me where to find them."

She clutched at his sleeve in terror.

"Oh, don't, sir, don't! You don't know how ugly Tom is when he has been drinking. He might hurt you!"

"It is quite as likely that I should hurt him," he answered, grimly, with a suppressed fury which she,

woman-like, admired. Next moment, however, her glow of comfort in finding a protector faded.

"It wouldn't do any good. Nobody cares. I've tried and tried, but it isn't any use. There's others that don't have to try; they get it all. You don't know anything about it. Every time I go to the grocery store . . . they don't care what they say before me. Oh, I'm all tired out! Isn't there *any* way for me to be good?"

He had a lump in his throat.

"Yes," he said, strongly, "and you shall be good. You shall be a good woman. You have been trying to take care of yourself. Let God take care of you, now . . . like a father. . . ."

He stopped, for the lack-luster eyes made no response. Was he talking conventionally to this poor girl?

"Doesn't that mean anything to you?" he asked, gently.

"I don't know."

"Would not your father have protected you from evil if he had lived?"

"I presume so," said the girl, "if he could."

Dale remembered. Of what use to try that tack longer?

"Have you ever had a real friend to stand by you and help you? Any one?"

She picked at her dress with her fingers, and at last looked up, shyly. There was something innocent, appealing in the look.

"You've been the best of anybody," said Myrtie.

A mist clouded his eyes. It seemed to him the most pathetic speech that he had ever heard. "The Son

of Man came . . . to minister — ” The words flashed into his brain with new meaning.

“ Think of Christ as your minister, then,” said he. “ One whom you can trust absolutely in everything, and who knows how to help you better than I can; only, turn to Him, Myrtie, keep on turning to Him. Do you pray ? ”

“ I’ve tried to. It doesn’t do any good.”

“ Did you expect to be heard ? ”

He was asking for information, and she told him the truth.

“ Not much.”

“ Well, I am going to pray for you now, and I expect to be heard. Come.”

The girl slid to the floor beside him, and her head dropped on her arms. She heard her heart beat in her ears. The minister’s voice was low; he used no set phrases; he stopped to find words; he talked. It was the first time in her life that this outcast from a Christian community had heard her name spoken to God. The bottom dropped out of her sordid existence. She caught at the nearest thing in the dark.

“ I didn’t know he cared — like that! ” she thought.

Do not think she was not praying. It was prayer.

Dale rose and faced her with jaw set, and white marks where his fingers had gripped his cheek.

“ Now, Myrtie, listen. The kingdom of God is here among us, and you belong to it. You have cast in your lot with us, and you must stand by us as we mean to stand by you. You are to come to church, and identify yourself openly with all that is good, and pay no attention to anything that people may say. Promise to do it! ”

"I'll try, sir. I'll do the best I can."

"It is getting late for you to be on the street alone. I will walk back with you."

"Don't do that, Mr. Dale; don't, sir! I'm not afraid to go home now. They might talk against you if they saw you with me, and I couldn't bear that!"

"That makes no difference," said Dale. "I shall not allow one of my own people to be disrespectfully addressed for want of protection."

She backed against the wall, and burst into tears.

"Oh!" she sobbed, her face in her hands, "I didn't know as anybody would be willing to go home with me now. They used to . . . before . . . I didn't suppose anybody'd want to be seen with me any more. I don't want you should."

He was silent. He had tried hard to put himself in her place, and this reward was given him, — this glimpse into a poverty-stricken existence, whose only gleam of romance had been the brief time when there had been some one to "go home with her." Poor drabbed wings that should have known the ecstasy of flight! He felt a terrible pity.

As they crossed the head of Main Street to descend toward the river, a portly figure met them, wearing a white "nubia" wound around her head and held across her mouth by her teeth. Mrs. Purple had been making a neighborhood call. The incandescent lights flared up suddenly upon the couple before her. Dale's face was tense and bright, as if he had just wrestled with an angel and prevailed; but Mrs. Purple was not looking for angels. She saw a shrinking form beside him, keeping half a step in the rear.

"Hm!" she said to herself, with meaning.

It was shortly noised abroad that the minister had been seen on the streets at night with "that Cole girl." An anonymous letter warned him to keep better company. Dr. Kent, coming up to his study for a smoke, found him in a rage.

"If any more of these cowardly attacks are made upon me I will resign! I've had enough of this atmosphere, it's unclean! Because I have tried to protect an unfortunate girl . . . how long do you think she would be persecuted if the whole church came to her protection? Can't my people see whether I am an honest man or not? What if all the outcasts of this town were to take refuge at my door—I wish to Heaven that there were anything in me to bring them here—would my character suffer?"

"Your character might not suffer," said Dr. Kent, slowly; "your reputation would."

"Then let it suffer." Dale hissed the words through shut teeth, and, tearing the letter in two, tossed the pieces into the fire.

"Dale, do you think that you are experienced enough to deal with these cases?"

"No. Who is? I do not call them 'cases,' though. You think me inexperienced. I have had experience enough to know the difference between those who long to be better and those who do not. If you had ever lived. . . ." He checked himself, and began to pace the floor.

"David, do you know what evil is?" he asked. "Do you know how strong it is, how subtle? How it takes the heart out of one? Have you ever had to struggle to keep your focus true?"

"Sometimes," answered David Kent, after a silence.

When Deacon Branch called upon Dale to expostulate, the latter was patient with him. He must act as he thought right. He trusted the church would help him instead of criticizing him. He proposed prayer. The deacon was considered to have a "gift in prayer," and had many stock phrases about "circumcision or uncircumcision," and "the race that is set before us;" but when Dale had said a few simple words out of a tired heart, he could not find a word to say. If the Holy Spirit really were in the room with them, as Dale's words implied, it was — rather inconvenient!

Dale was affectionate with him, and at last sent him home with his conventional little soul for once lifted above itself. Alas for the anti-climax!

"Well, did you get him to listen to reason?" asked his wife tartly.

"Hen!" spluttered the deacon, "hen-minded! That's what some one calls women, and he's right. Scratching round all day long, and not getting nothing half the time. In future, Maria, be kind enough to leave the affairs of the church to Men."

"Why, Ithamar!" exclaimed Mrs. Branch.

Dale's thought went out to Shirley DeForest at this crisis. If she were only to stretch out that strong, fine hand of hers, he felt that the girl would be safe; but he could not ask her for her help. He would not even ring her door-bell lest he should draw ill-natured comments upon her, too. They were capable of it, these people! Instead, he called a meeting of the Home Department, and stated the case. Myrtie Cole needed the ministrations of the church. Some one must take care of her little boy while she was at church. He would leave the arrangements with them, only he desired

that they would make themselves responsible. Would that he commanded a squadron, and could issue an order: "Madam: You will proceed to Willow Lane without delay, and use your utmost endeavors to carry out the instructions of the Department. Very respectfully, your obedient servant." No, things were not done that way!

"I couldn't walk so far; besides, I should hate to miss your sermons," said Mrs. Hitchcock, whose harassed face looked more harassed than ever.

"We will not require too much of you," said Dale, gently.

"Well, *I* can't go way over there every Sunday," said Mrs. Sutherland, with some irritation. "I don't believe in coddling them up, anyway. . . ."

The chapel door opened, and Ruth entered with a swirl of feathers and lace, to Dale's dismay. He thought he had managed it so cleverly to keep her out of the affair.

"A powwow to-day?" she inquired. "Why, no one sent me a notice. What is it about?"

"It's that Cole girl," said Mrs. Sutherland, sullenly.

Ruth turned away from her to Dale.

"*You* tell me," she demanded.

He did so.

"You poor things! You poor, timid things!" cried Ruth. "Are you afraid that funny little imp will contaminate you? Just leave him to me, Mr. Dale; I will be responsible for him."

"Would it not be better if one of the older ladies —?" began Dale, a speech Miss Nelie never forgave.

"And your Momma might object," added Mrs. Hitchcock.

"Oh, Mamma has nothing to do with it. She goes her way and I go mine."

"If Myrtie Cole expects us to do anything more for her, she ought to show some repentance first," said Mrs. Sutherland.

"Would you have her show her repentance by staying away?" asked Ruth. Mrs. Sutherland flushed.

"My dear Miss Gilmore, you are too young to discuss such matters. When you are older you will learn that an unwise humanitarianism does no good." She pointed this remark at Dale. She considered that he had been guilty of bad taste.

"I don't know why you should call me your dear Miss Gilmore," answered Ruth. "I am young, it is true. I hope I shall never live to be old if it makes me such a Pharisee as some of you are. Shall we consider the matter settled, Mr. Dale? I move we adjourn."

She looked so formidable, standing there with her head thrown back, and her little smile of scornful amusement, and with that consciousness ever present to their minds that she was Miss Gilmore, and could buy them all up, that they all cringed. Dale saw it, and his face darkened.

"You look like a thunder-cloud; what is the matter?" inquired Ruth, who had coolly handed him her parasol, so that he was perforce walking up the hill beside her.

"I confess I should have preferred a different arrangement," he answered, stiffly.

"Why? Are you like those old tabbies, thinking it can do me any harm to see to that little boy?"

"I was thinking of Joey, not of you."

"Oh! And you think that I shall do him harm?"

"I am not sure that you will do him any good. He is a peculiar child, and needs careful training. You will make a plaything of him. You will give him candy, and turn him loose on your grounds, and he will be ungovernable after it. That is the way money spoils —"

"Go on," said Ruth, tapping her foot on the turf.

"I beg your pardon."

"You ought to have done that before. I want you to finish now. You mean that money spoils me. How does it spoil me?"

He hesitated, flushing.

"Go on," she said, imperiously.

"You appropriate whatever takes your fancy without yielding to others the same freedom you demand for yourself. You take advantage of your position to say what you like to them, knowing that they are too much influenced by the thought of your money to be independent."

"Do I want them to be influenced by it?" she broke out. Her eyes were bright and hurt; the flush in her cheeks had deepened to an angry pink. "If you think you can have what you want because you have money, you know nothing about it. All I want is to be just myself! Why do you lecture me? You like your own way, *in your own way*, and — and I think you take advantage of your position to say whatever you like to me!"

"No; not what I like," he answered, rather unsteadily. "It hurts me worse than it hurts you. I did not intend to say it, but since I have, I must stick to it."

"Yes," Ruth retorted; "it's firmness in a man; it's obstinacy in a woman."

Dale began to shake. She glanced askance at him. The corners of her mouth relaxed, and they stood eying each other like two children. Ruth extended her hand inflexibly for her parasol, then advanced a step.

"If I agree to — dispense with the candy, will you trust me? You'd better, there's no one else!"

He bit his lip, and swallowed something.

"Yes, I will trust you," he replied.

"I'm extravagant, I'm flippant, I have no fine feelings," Ruth summed up to Shirley. "I browbeat others —"

"Ruth?"

"That's what Ham said. They truckle to me, and I snub them; as if I wanted them to truckle to me! I'd rather have them talk back."

"You do not seem to like it very well when they do!" suggested Shirley, with some humor.

"Because — because — what right has he to lecture me when he — Have you ever seen that thunder and lightning look! Oh, he'd be so nice if he only wasn't a minister!" She took her friend by both hands. "He never lectures you, does he?"

"Oh, if you call it lecturing."

"If he dares to think that you are not just perfect! Shirley . . . has he . . . do you —?"

"Do I — what, Ruth?"

Ruth's face was all one flush. She nestled her head against Shirley's chair, and put her arms around her. The action had something gallant, protecting in it.

"She is playing at love until the other love comes,"

thought the older woman, not owing to herself that the play hurt. All passes, even a girl's romantic fancy.

"Don't cry, little girl," she said. "Nobody knows how hard it is to be a girl but the girls themselves; but we get over it!"

"Shirley, won't you please try to make me more like you?"

"No, I will not," said Shirley with warmth. "Why should you be like me? You underrate yourself. Be gracious as well as straightforward, be a little tender while you are a girl, and your world will clear up to you."

"I shall never have what I want, never. Oh, I hate the money! It comes between me and everything I care for."

Shirley smoothed her bright hair.

"She is growing up fast," she thought. "I hope he will not make her suffer for his pride."

CHAPTER TWENTY

GRANNY AKERS sat at one end of a fallen tree, the minister at the other. From the woods behind them a small brook ran gurgling down to meet its fellow; overhead, at the Torch's peak, a little pine-tree curled outward like smoke. Between them stood a dilapidated basket full of spoils.

"Let me see; did we eat all the cookies?" suggested Dale, presently.

"You et 'em," Granny Akers replied. "I can get along all day on a piece of sassafras bark. Here, there's one left; you might as well eat it."

"Thank you," he said, accepting it meekly. "It takes a good deal of sustenance to keep my brain in condition to argue with you."

"Shouldn't wonder!" A glint in her eye showed her enjoyment of these skirmishes, in which Dale had begun to feel his very reputation involved. "Well, go on. I can follow you; mind, I don't say that I agree with it. I always felt sorry for them Egyptians that got drowned. Those wars and killings were childish; an' I don't think much of a God that would let the sun stand still so somebody could beat. The other side had just as good a right to fair dealin's."

"Exactly," said Dale. With arms around his knees, he unfolded still further the historic method of modern criticism. It struck him as one of the ironies

of things that the one person to discuss it with him should be this eccentric old woman.

"That makes more sense," she admitted, "but you get it out of your own head; you don't get it out of the Bible. If that's all it comes to I can do that for myself. This is a splendid world! Did you ever see snow mountains? They say at sunset sometimes it's like wild roses lyin' on 'em; did you ever see it? There's beauty everywhere, and it's a part of me, and I'm part of it, old and homely's I be; that's my religion."

"Love and beauty are one," said Dale. "You leave out love. Love is meant to put beauty into living."

"Why don't it do it, then?" asked Granny Akers, stubbornly.

"It does," said Dale, and patted her knee. The old woman shied, but his eyes held her; there was a smile in them, and the pucker of his mouth was wholly soothing; it looked as if he were going to say, "Whoa!"

"If you were turned inside out, you would be just a fractious little girl," he declared.

"Maybe I be," said Granny, bewildered. "Maybe I wa'n't a little girl when I had a right to be. Nobody cares now."

"Except God," said Dale, with no change of tone. "Your make-up is no mystery to Him. He wanted people like you in the world. You are not the only person to make a God in the Israelite image, and then turn away from it. What God is, is more than I have words to tell you, but I'll do my level best. I want you to come to hear me."

His rich young face was so close that she had to draw back her head to see him with her far-sighted

eyes. He gave her a strange, human feeling. She tried to temporize.

"Well, if you would preach about something I cared about, with outdoors in it —"

Dale sprang up and faced her with set jaw.

"Mrs. Akers, I am not in the pulpit to please myself, nor my people, but to obey my Master; and I shall preach as I see fit."

"So do, so do," murmured Granny Akers, vanquished.

Mrs. Wheeler kept a small millinery shop in Market Street. It was a one-storied building eleven feet wide, wedged in between two taller blocks. In its one window were two skeleton hats, a sparse length of faded ribbon, and a few flowers, — not her newest ones, for what was the use of putting her best things in the window to spoil? People who wanted to see what she had could come inside. She was trying a shirt-waist on her only clerk, a fat, red-haired girl of fourteen, one morning, when Granny Akers walked in and announced that she had come to buy a new bonnet. Seeing her open the door, Jenny made a dive under the counter, and, reaching up, clawed her dress toward her in a spasm of impotent rage.

"You can come out, Jenny, it's only Mrs. Akers," said Mrs. Wheeler. "I thought it was Mr. Branch for Mrs. Branch's hat; he was going to call for it this noon. I hope he'll keep away till then."

"Did you want flowers on it?" she asked, when the preliminaries had been settled.

"I thought maybe you could use the chrysanthemums on this bonnet. I sha'n't pay more than \$1.67 for it."

Jenny disappeared under the counter for the second time.

"Stop!" whispered the milliner, repressively.

"I can't!" said the girl in dumb show, stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth in hysterical mirth.

"Those flowers wouldn't look right at all. I've got some here that I can let you have reasonable."

"That geranium is lovely; it looks just like a real one," said Jenny, coming out of her retirement. She had an artist's soul in a roly-poly body, and lived in a state of chronic rebellion against the universe for letting her be fat, and broad-backed, and red-haired.

"Just like a real one," echoed Granny Akers, struck by an idea. "I tell you what you do. Trim it just as if you was going to put on those flowers, but don't put 'em on."

"It will take more trimming without flowers."

"It'll take \$1.67 worth," answered Granny, firmly. "You think it'll be a funny bonnet, don't you?" turning to Jenny.

"Yes'm," the girl blurted out, while her florid cheeks grew redder.

"Hush, Jenny, I'm ashamed of you. Children and fools speak the truth, Mrs. Akers."

"And some besides fools," said Granny Akers. "Telling the truth comes as cheap as lying in the long run; it's a good deal more fun, too! How's your business?"

"Well, not very good this spring. Hitchcock gets all the trade. The big fish eat up the little ones."

"If I was keeping a store," said Granny Akers, "I'd try to get folks to come in, instead of hoping they'd stay away."

Sunday morning, she picked her finest geraniums and finished her bonnet. Viewed as a mere background for floral decoration, it awoke professional instincts. Carefully she pinned the sprays in place, and tried it on. It was an unqualified success.

"I can have something new all the time till frost," she thought, divided between the middle aisle and the gallery. Up-stairs, no one would notice her bonnet; downstairs, it would be said that the minister had reformed her. Vanity triumphed, and to the astonishment of Waukomis, Granny Akers walked up the aisle in the decent black she had left off fifteen years before. Dale saw her, and enjoyed her capitulation. There was humor in the moment which did him good, for he was not going to say comfortable words that morning.

His people had come to have the fundamental claim upon him; they belonged to the family, and, like the father of a family, he meant to take them to task. Without moving he could see them: Mr. Hitchcock, his wide, cruel mouth shut tight like a fish's; the Sutherlands; the Pembers, conscious of inferiority; Myrtie, shrinking behind a pillar. Ruth Gilmore had kept her word, and was absent, but Deacon Branch's eyes were on him as usual in affectionate apprehension lest he should do something original. Seeing which, it was after all with a smile deep down in a heart which held both laughter and tears that he went forward to the pulpit, and quietly gave out his text:

"Mine own vineyard have I not kept."

Two hundred years ago, he began, a little band of fourteen families had pushed their way through the wilderness to this spot, and, without waiting to be organized as a town, had taxed themselves that they

might plant this church, as a vineyard on a hill. Their task was over, but the task of to-day was no less noble. It needed a manly faith, a robust idealism. There had been many changes in modern society, but the mission of the church was the same now as then; the mission of the vineyard, to bear fruit for men's souls. Had their church been faithful to its mission?

"My people, I say to you that if the finger of the Spirit could touch you this morning, from you as one man would be heard that old cry, with its burden of things undone: 'They made me keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept'!"

How had they failed to keep the vineyard? By their materialism. There was no place where the love of money took stronger hold than in a prosperous village. By their indifference, their selfishness. The problems of the country church were social problems, and they could only be solved by a loving spirit. Their vision was at fault. The sin of the church was want of love. Love was positive; it constrained men to do its will. . . . Those who, by misjudgments, by unbridled speech, were stripping their fellow creatures of the atmosphere which was their right, did they realize that it was their own lovelessness that they were exposing? Life in a country town would gain unspeakably in dignity could men agree to respect the loneliness, the mystery of the soul.

He asked them to consider the instinct which brought them there to worship, the conviction that they could reach a diviner living together than apart. The kingdom of Heaven was among them, with all their faults and weakness, and there was no man or woman so insignificant that he could not help or hinder it.

They were all keepers of the vineyard, and in the riches of the common store would they also find their own.

"My people, keep your vineyard. It is your own only because it is God's. He might have worked alone, but He has chosen to work through the wills of His children. May He bestow His grace abundantly upon us, that our church may grow strong; that those who hunger and thirst for life may be fed. Let us pray."

"Maria, that was a good sermon," commented Deacon Branch.

"He had somebody in mind, I know by the way he talked; I wonder who it was?" said his wife.

Had she followed him into his study, she would have been no wiser. He threw himself into a chair, and laid his head down on the desk. It was all words, words.

"They will not hear," he communed with himself. "I am a failure here. The quest is not for me. I do not love these people. I am not a loving man."

Sensitive to every breath of feeling, it seemed to him that people avoided him after his sermon. Well, if they were angry with him for his plain speaking, he was ready to go; only let the situation develop quickly!

But the situation did not develop. The opposition which he felt remained a furtive thing, never coming out into the open, though he could guess its source. Outwardly, his preaching was successful. The townspeople dropped into the evening service, the seats had sold better than for some years past, and Waukomis, being of the generation that seeks for signs, approved; but he himself knew that it was not success. Linda, who knew so well the weak joints in every one's armor,

had told him what would happen. Would he end in acquiescence?

He came out from a committee meeting one afternoon just as Dr. Kent turned the corner in his new runabout. Proud of his toy, he insisted upon Dale's trying it with him. On the outskirts of the village a solitary rooster lifted up his voice, and crowed lustily.

"Do it again; it has a good, male sound," said Dale, apostrophizing the rooster. Dr. Kent threw back his head and laughed.

"You need a tonic!" said he. "How would a day on board a battleship do? By the way, did you know that poor Lowry was all to pieces?"

"No, indeed. What is the matter with him?"

"Mrs. Purple," answered the doctor, laconically. "He is on the verge of nervous prostration. She will neither take proper care of him herself, nor let any one else come there to do it. Some crony of hers is there now, 'helping.' They sit in the hall just outside of his door, talking over old family histories. It would goad me to murder. I stayed there half the night, yesterday, to see that he had attention for once."

The news made Dale anxious, and he called at the house next day, but Mrs. Purple refused to let him see the patient. The town was woman-ridden, thought Dale.

At sunset he stood in his porch for a moment. The sun was in his eyes, and he put up one hand to shade them. Some strange object was hastening down the street. It advanced with jerky strides, like a puppet on wires. Its eyes were wild, and it muttered. It was wrapped in a red quilt of patriotic pattern, and the blue stars trailed on the ground. One hand held the im-

provised toga together, while with the other It sawed the air after the manner of one who harangues an invisible foe in delirious dreams.

The minister went out to the street, and laid a detaining hand on the figure.

"Mr. Lowry, where are you going?" he asked.

"I am going," said Mr. Lowry, "to find a lodge in some vast wilderness! The gadflies have done it, sir! They have driven me out of house and home." He swept his arm around like a tragedian to point to his house, and the red trappings slipped off, exposing his tall, gaunt form in its gray dressing-gown. "They are there now, buzzing, and stinging, and feeding on carrion. I'd drown myself in the reservoir to get rid of those dumnation women!"

"Come with me," said Dale, putting an arm around him. The support was needed, for Mr. Lowry tottered from weakness. As soon as they had reached the calm retreat of the study, he collapsed on the couch. Dale disentangled the folds of the quilt, and spread it over him gently. There was something soothing in the touch of those small, plump hands. Mr. Lowry opened his eyes.

"Do you think she saw me come in here?"

"I cannot say."

"She'll be over if she did. Lock the door! She'd walk right into your study without knocking."

"I think not," said Dale; nevertheless, he turned the key in the front door, and reconnoitered at a window.

"The coast is clear," he announced, returning.

"For this relief much thanks," drawled Mr. Lowry, and his dull eyes twinkled faintly.

"When did you eat last?"

"I don't know; oh, yes, she brought me some mess or other, but she dipped the spoon into it and tasted it, and I did not want it after that."

"I will ask Joanna to bring you something."

Mr. Lowry sprang up on his elbow. The lines in his face started out afresh.

"Don't!" he begged, in excitement; "let me have a man in the room. I wish I was a Trappist, I'd enjoy it. I wouldn't care if I never saw a woman again as long as I lived. Gabble, gabble, gabble — rock, rock, rock —" He sank back exhausted.

"Poor man, it's just pitiful," said Joanna. "No, sir, I sha'n't mind one mite. I'll set the tray outside the door. But what I want to know is, what we going to do to-night? He can't go back; he ain't able. Too, she'd drive him crazy. Hadn't I better make up the bed in the spare room?"

"That was what I was thinking of, but I wished to consult you first. It will make more trouble for you than for me."

As the war-horse sniffs the battle and rejoices, so sniffed Joanna.

"I rather think I'm not so hard put to it that I can't take some decent care of a poor sick man that don't ask anything of anybody but just to be let alone and be comfortable, — and not complain to my neighbors about it, either! Why, I know that man has been perfectly miserable!"

"Why did he not get another housekeeper? He was a free agent."

"Hm. A wagon with one wheel down deep in a rut ain't free. You have got to hitch up and get the wheel out before you can go ahead. If he had been

firm to begin with, it might have been different; but he didn't know how. There, you take that in. He needn't have minded my bringing it in to him — you know I'm no talker — but he ought to be humored. She never humors him."

"One of us must go for the doctor, Joanna."

"I'll go," said Joanna, promptly. "Let's see; they may not have found out yet that he's gone; anyway, they'd peek through the blinds awhile before they did anything. You don't want her coming over and making a fuss just now, do you?"

"Certainly not. Anything but that."

"Then I'd better go the other way round by Brook Street, for if she was to see me go by she'd know I'd gone for the doctor."

"Why should she infer that?"

Joanna smiled at this masculine obtuseness.

"I've been to market once to-day, and if I'd forgotten something I wanted for tea I'd have my basket; and if I was going shopping I'd have the bag you gave me Christmas; and I'm not dressed to make calls, and Saturday is my day to change my library book, and it's too early for the mail; so there's nothing left but the doctor. I could change my dress, though; that would throw her off the scent."

"I hardly think the exigencies of the case require such mystifying measures," said Dale.

"I love to hear him go on that way, so solemn, when he's laughing inside," thought Joanna.

And in fact the minister was laughing as he carried off the tray.

"The children of Israel could not drive out the

Jebusites, but the Jebusites remain among them to this day,'” quoth he.

“Is that you?” exclaimed Mr. Lowry, starting at the light touch. “I did not know you were in the room.”

“I am sorry to have disturbed you.”

“It isn’t that; I’m used to having the floor shake when any one comes in. She put her foot down all of a piece, like an elephant. My wife — ”

Half an hour later he opened his eyes in bed, and took up the thread of his remark as if he had not dropped it.

“My wife,” said Mr. Lowry, “was a small woman.”

CHAPTER TWENTY - ONE

“WELL, you have let yourself in for a nice job,” was Dr. Kent’s comment. He walked into Dale’s own room and sat down on the bed. “Haven’t you enough to do in your own line without trying to play special Providence?”

Dale stood squarely on both feet, *planté là*, as the doctor said to himself.

“Can you name a hospital within reach?” he asked.

Dr. Kent tapped the brass rail impatiently.

“Or a trained nurse?”

“None nearer than New Haven.”

“Or any one with tact enough to take charge of affairs, without coming into collision with the present incumbent?”

“That is impossible. I will not answer for the consequences if he is not protected from Mrs. Purple. I believe he hates the woman.”

“Then stop growling, old fellow, and help us through.”

“It is not your business.”

“I do not mind more work.”

“Oh, I am not afraid of your overworking; it’s the conceit of you altruists, rushing in where professionals would run away, if they could with decency. This is not going to be a simple case. Lowry is worn to

strings. His heart is weak; he lies awake nights. He will jump when the door slams — ”

“The doors will not slam.”

“He will be restless if he is kept in bed, where he ought to be, and a nuisance if he is allowed to be up; and the worst will come later on, when you are getting tired of it.”

“Those are bad symptoms, but you do not say anything about the cause. The cause is that his life has been starved. You doctors ignore main issues. You analyze the blood, you turn X-rays upon a malformed bone; but the man’s spirit escapes you, and you get focussed upon disease, and influenced and molded by it because you fail to see where the vital need is.”

Dr. Kent leaned forward over the foot-rail.

“You think I do not see? If I were to tell a tenth part of what I see, the village would be too hot to hold me! I have to keep my patients, not lose them, if I am to do them any good. I have to keep on safe ground, listen to symptoms, measure out medicines. There are homes here where, if I were to put so much as a finger upon the underlying moral conditions, I should be shown to the door for my pains.”

“It is hard to see all that, and have no remedy to offer.”

“Have you a remedy? ”

“Yes. More life.”

“I can’t give them life,” said the doctor, moodily.

“No, it has already been given,” said Dale, and a light flashed into his face. “Kent, they taught you how to administer your remedies; they did not teach us that. I wish they had! See to the physical diagnosis;

I'll try my hand at the other. I wish I could think that I do my work as well as you do yours. Hark!"

The door-bell had just rung. It was shortly followed by a colloquy of rising voices in the hall below. Dr. Kent got up. A very queer smile crossed his face.

"By Jove!" said he; "we've forgotten all about Mrs. Purple!"

.

"Is Mr. Lowry here?" inquired Mrs. Purple.

Joanna held the door open a cubit's breadth without inviting admission, and gazed past her visitor with a fixed, inscrutable expression. Her upper lip was inflexible.

"He is."

"That's a mercy!" said Mrs. Purple. By a dexterous movement for so stout a woman, she pressed past Joanna into the hall, and stood blinking in the semi-darkness. She carried a little fan, which she agitated back and forth with the rapidity of a winnowing machine. "You ought to come right over and told me. I've had a terrible time! He must have been out of his head to run off that way. I've seen it coming a good while. Where is he?"

"Not in the parlor," answered Joanna, her upper lip stiffer than before. ("We must be very judicious, you and I, Joanna," Dale had said. Joanna was striving to be judicious.)

"Well, where, I ast you?"

"Up-stairs."

"Well, he's give me a dreadful fright. I don't know as I shall ever get over it. It's brought on my palpitations."

"Palpitate," said Joanna, with dilated nose, "palpitate. That's what you've been doing the last two hours, ain't it — palpitatin'?"

"Aigh?" said Mrs. Purple, throwing out her chin. "You needn't think you've got any call to come-up over me, because you're keeping house for the minister, Joanna Smith. Can't anybody say I haven't been doin' everything for him, hard's it is. I'll go right up-stairs. Needn't come; I can find my way."

"Wait. I must speak to Mr. Dale first."

Mrs. Purple shoved her aside.

"I won't be ordered around by anybody! I don't want any interferin'," said she, and pushed her broad bulk as far as the foot of the stairs. There she stopped, for half-way up stood the minister. He had not had time to descend farther.

Mrs. Purple's features underwent a lightning change, and her false teeth glittered in a propitiating smile.

"Oh, Mr. Dale, is that you? I'm so thankful Mr. Lowry come here instead of wandering off somewhere. I've been dreadful anxious. It's a real Providence." She began laboriously to climb the stairs.

A little man gains dignity by standing on a higher level. Dale knew this. He had a bell-like quality in his voice at times; it was there now.

"Dr. Kent at present is trying to give Mr. Lowry sleep, and does not wish to have any one enter the room."

"I'll keep 'em out," said Mrs. Purple. "He hadn't ought to have any one near him but them he's used to. I'll see to it," and with a backward toss of her head at Joanna, who stood calmly looking on in the dining-room doorway, she prepared to mount further.

"The doctor's orders are that no one shall enter the room at present," repeated Dale.

"That don't mean me," said Mrs. Purple. "Mr. Lowry thinks as much of me as if I was his sister. I won't be kept out. He hasn't any right —"

Dale lifted one hand.

"I must request you to lower your voice. You are disturbing the patient."

"Who — me? I ain't disturbing anybody. He can't hear. I don't know what you mean, talking so. He couldn't get along without me. Ain't you going to let me go right up-stairs?"

"Not at present. When he wakes, if he has any instructions to give you, he will send for you."

Mrs. Purple's countenance was lurid.

"Instructin' me? That's a pretty way to talk! I guess you don't know how long I been doin' for him. I ain't going to stand any more such works as this." She pressed forward, but Dale stretched his hand across to the wall. He stood very erect. His glossy cuffs and collar made high lights in the semi-darkness of the stairs.

"You just lemme pass."

"No."

She swelled with indignation.

"Why, you little whipper-snapper, I could throw you over the balusters with one hand as easy as not, if I was to try!"

"You will not try," said Dale.

"Aigh? How d' you know I won't?"

He came down a step, and she gave back. If she'd 'a' thought, she said afterward, she wouldn't 'a' done it; but all thought was scattered. She tripped on her

skirt, floundered, and caught clumsily at the rails for support.

"You ain't doin' right!" she vociferated, not looking higher than his chin. "He won't get up. I've seen 'em go just that way. Men think they know it all, but I could tell 'em!"

Impassive as the sphinx, the minister descended another step and another, while she retreated, crab-wise, to the foot of the stairs, panting tempestuously and badly shaken.

"This way," he said, and conducted her to his study. He stepped back to allow her to enter, and closed the door.

"Bully boy," muttered the doctor, looking over the railing. He reëntered the bedroom. Mr. Lowry looked past him anxiously; his fingers twitched at the counterpane.

"Routed!" said the doctor, and a sardonic smile drew up the corners of his mouth, showing his even teeth, — teeth curving inward, and slightly discolored from smoking.

"And darkly looked he at the wall,
And darkly at the foe.

.
But now no sound of laughter
Was heard among the foes;
A wild and wrathful clamor
From all the vanguard rose."

"Te! he!" chuckled Mr. Lowry, exhausted, and closed his eyes. It was bliss to him to be in the hands of men. Dr. Kent watched him from the foot of the bed, his hands in his pockets, his lean shoulders drawn

higher than their wont; and a patient fighting for life would have turned from smooth phrases and a buoyant presence to that mordant face, with its intent look, wherein the singular powers of the man were revealed. He strode silently to the window.

"It's a puzzle altogether," he soliloquized. "Inertia, malice, petty motives and prejudices, and bundles of habits, habits, and no horizon. And they talk of the dignity of the soul! I can believe it in the slums . . . I've seen it in hospitals . . . that Russian Jew — what was his name? — who died in the ophthalmic ward, — but such as that harpy down-stairs?"

Meanwhile, Joanna was going over her points, lest she should forget something, when she had the delight of telling the story.

"He stood there as ca'm and composed as if it'd been a funeral. 'Doctor's orders,' says he. 'Go home and wait till you're sent for,' he says. S-sh! She's coming out!"

The interview had not lasted long. Mrs. Purple looked demoralized as she came forth, but she retained energy enough to give a stab at the door.

"I guess if all was known about you and your doin's you wouldn't hold your head so high . . . but I'll expose it!"

The minister closed the door upon her in silence. His lip curled grimly.

"The medicine is taking effect," said Dr. Kent, coming down-stairs. "Don't call me up in the middle of the night if you can help it. Amateur nurses generally do. You look gloomy; what is it?"

"Nothing; only, I said a few plain words to the woman about her duty, and she gave me a glimpse into

the dark holes of her mind in return. It was — not edifying.”

Dr. Kent shrugged his shoulders.

“Every country town breeds two or three ghouls of that sort. They have flop-overs with pious texts on the wall; they read religious papers and enjoy cant; but if they had a free pass into heaven every day they never would use it but once, because the atmosphere would be too rarefied to suit them. Well, good-bye. Napoleon was a little man.”

“I fail to see the connection.”

“Of course,” said Dr. Kent.

As he passed an old-fashioned brown cottage with plenty of gingerbread molding in cream color about its veranda, a cane was thrust out of the window to attract his attention, and the profile of a hooked nose showed behind it.

“Doctor! Wait-a minute!” called a high-pitched feminine voice. The front door flew open, and a slim figure hurried down the path with a swish of black skirts, putting both hands up to smooth her thin hair. Ten years before Lizzie Pons had been a pretty girl, but the winds of her life had all blown one way, and she had now reached the stage of feeling in which ambition is limited to a clean shirt-waist, and the newest thing in collars.

“Father wants you to come in, Doctor,” she panted.

“Is he worse?” asked Dr. Kent, falling into step beside her.

“He says he is,” Lizzie answered.

Major Pons sat propped up in an easy chair, his foot extended on a stool. His red, large-veined hands caressed the handle of his cane. It had a beak in it,

and so had the nose above it. Above the nose were two watchful eyes, with a dull gleam in them like a carbuncle's.

"How is the rheumatism?" inquired the doctor, abruptly.

"Pesters the life out of me," was the answer. "Can't sleep nights; heard the clock strike every hour last night. Shooting pains all over me."

"Hurt you there?" asked the doctor, giving him a cautious prod in the lumbar region.

"Like fury," growled the Major, without wincing. "It's in my spine, and all over me."

Dr. Kent sat down, stretching his long hands across his medicine case.

"Great doings up at Lowry's, they say," began Major Pons.

Dr. Kent's face was blank.

"What do you mean by 'great doings'?" he asked, innocently.

"Why, he's gone crazy, they say. Started to run away somewhere, half dressed. The minister ran out to stop him, and he tried to fight him. He had to call Mrs. Purple to come and help him, and it took them both to get him into the house; he was shouting like the dickens all the way."

"Interesting, if true," said Dr. Kent.

"Isn't it so? Haven't you heard? You came from that way," said Major Pons, suspiciously.

"One has to come here to get the news. I have made several calls this afternoon. Pember's boy is getting over the measles. It was a light case."

"P'm, p'm;" the old man blew discontentedly through shut teeth. Dr. Kent laid hold of his wrist.

The gentleness of those bony fingers quelled speech, but Miss Lizzie, sitting behind her father, was eager.

"It would be awful if he shouldn't get over it, and they had to take him to an asylum," she ventured.

"It would. I think we had better not bulk too largely on that contingency, Miss Lizzie."

"I knew you'd been there!" exclaimed the Major, triumphantly. "Isn't he crazy, then?"

"No more than the rest of us."

"Ain't *anything* the matter?"

"Oh, yes, he is run down, and wants a change. No sign of insanity under the circumstances; quite the reverse. Let me see your tongue . . . way out. Are you drinking plenty of water, as I told you?"

"He won't drink water; he wants the coffee-pot kept on the stove all day," put in Lizzie, in a purposely suppressed voice.

"A quart of water a day were the instructions."

"I can't drink water; too cold on my stomach," said the old man, testily.

"Boil it," said Dr. Kent, opening his case.

"The back of my neck aches as if there was a dozen screws in it."

"Ah, you have been using your eyes too hard again."

"I'm not talking about my eyes; I'm talking about the back of my neck. It hasn't anything to do with my eyes."

"It has a good deal to do with your nerves. Don't read between daylight and dark."

"I've told him that, but he won't pay any attention," murmured Lizzie, with the sourly resigned expression of the worm that occasionally turns.

"What are you whispering about? I won't have you sitting behind me; get over there where I can see you. I suppose you think those little pills of yours are a cure-all, Doctor? They aren't doing me an atom of good. There don't anything have the strength things used to have."

"Pink tea is what you want," said Dr. Kent. "Grind your tablets up in it, and you'll think you have got more for your money."

"Har?" asked the Major, making a conch shell of his ear. But he had heard.

Dr. Kent rose.

"What started those tales up there, if nothing happened? That's what I want to know," persisted the Major.

"That seems to be the question," said Dr. Kent.

The old man looked at him stubbornly from under his brows; the doctor returned the look. Grim enjoyment of the situation was in both faces. Thump, thump went the cane on the floor.

"I don't know how it is," said Major Pons, "but I never can get anything out of you about what's going on here."

"I tell you all that it's your business to know," answered Dr. Kent.

CHAPTER TWENTY - TWO

IT soon became known, however, that Mr. Lowry had taken refuge at the parsonage. During the next few days Joanna was summoned to the door so often to answer inquiries that her spirit waxed sarcastic.

"It'll take a wheelbarrow to carry all those dishes home," she declared.

"Our people are very kind," said Dale. "Are these jellies the right diet for nervous dyspepsia?"

"No, sir. Some bring them because it's the easiest thing, and makes them feel as if they had done something; and some bring the other things to show off their fancy cooking. That's Mrs. Hitchcock's second-best cut glass dish, with the nick in the bottom. If I was to tell her Mr. Lowry hadn't eaten anything for three days but ice-cream, she would think we didn't appreciate her pudding."

"I enjoyed that pudding very much," said Dale, blandly.

"The only one who has sent anything useful is Miss Shirley. She brought her mother's ice bag, and she asked the doctor about it first."

"I did not know Miss DeForest had been here," and Dale looked gratified.

"No, she didn't come ringing the bell in the middle of the morning. There are lots of good people, but *she* has common sense; and she is so pleasant-spoken, too."

"I like your word 'pleasant-spoken,'" said Dale.

At the door he half turned, and hesitated.

"Has any one from Oak Lodge been to inquire — Mr. Gilmore or Miss Gilmore?"

"No, sir." ("Dear, dear, he's so disappointed!" she thought.)

Meanwhile, Mr. Lowry lay quietly in the spare room. Contrary to the doctor's prophecy, he showed no impatience, and little restlessness. He seemed to have abandoned himself to the hands of others. To Joanna, whose presence he no longer opposed, he was courteous with an old-fashioned courtesy which won her heart, but he spoke little. He looked out of the window at the elms tossing violently in the cold spring rains, and remained with one hand under his cheek, so quiet that they thought him asleep. But he was not asleep, only exhausted; thinking the thoughts of the sleepless, which worm their way underground to the very foundations of life. How many myriads of tunnels cross and recross under a surface that gives no sign! Is the soil richer for them? Who knows?

"You keep your doors shut here, don't you?" he asked once, when Dale looked in for a minute.

"I do not want to disturb you with my comings and goings."

"It doesn't disturb me," said Mr. Lowry, with a faint, wintry smile. After that Dale left the door and that of his own room open, and stopped to speak, or waved his hand as he went up and down-stairs.

"I cannot discover whether he really is a little deaf, or whether it was Mrs. Purple's malice," he said to Dr. Kent.

"He hears what interests him. She bored him to

death, and the habit of being inattentive grew on him. Thank Heaven, she has gone!"

For on the previous day Mr. Lowry had summoned a barber, and after being shaved and attired in his wine-colored smoking-jacket, had sent for his former house-keeper. Mrs. Purple cringed in spirit. This quiet, dignified man was not the Mr. Lowry she had ruled so long. New forces were at work somewhere. She was compelled to hold herself in check.

"Just as you think best," said she, dabbing her eyes ostentatiously. "If you want me to leave you after all these years, if I'm no more use, oh, I'll go! I don't want to stay where I'm not wanted! I never thought I should be asked to leave my only home, 'n' no one care what becomes of me, but I'll go — oh, yes, I'll go!"

He did not weaken.

"I think on the whole it will be best, Mrs. Purple."

So Mrs. Purple had gone.

"Do you think as you go along?" Mr. Lowry inquired another day, when, as sometimes happened now, Dale sat writing in the same room.

"No, I do my thinking beforehand. My brain is of the auditory type; I have to hear myself think. It means slow work."

"I once thought of writing a history of Waukomis," Mr. Lowry confessed. "I tried several times to make a beginning, but it all evaporated before I could set it down. It was just a dream. I have always been a visionary."

"Begin it now," Dale suggested, much interested. "Begin anywhere you can get hold of it; and don't disparage your imagination. The world wants dreamers."

"Yes," Mr. Lowry assented, "it wants doers who can dream, but not dreamers who can't do. When I was a boy I thought I could do anything, because I was way ahead of the other fellows at school, but I got to browsing over old manuscript while they were hustling for places, and see where I am now. The worst of it is that if I had my life to live over again, I should probably do the same thing, for it is the dreams that I care for. I care more for them than for anything that can be had by putting them one side.

"Even when I was a small boy I used to spend my Saturdays, instead of fishing, rambling under the bluff where the Indian burying-ground is, trying to find the foundations of the pioneer house that was built there."

"Did you succeed?"

"Yes," said Mr. Lowry, and there was a little flush on his cheek, "I found traces of the cellar, and made a drawing of them. I'm the only one who ever did, I reckon. The town takes no interest in such things; they are only 'Old Lowry's hobby.' No, I have wasted hours, and made volumes of notes, but I shall never get any credit for it. That reminds me," he continued, and his face was wrinkled with mirth, "of Colonel Penfield, of Long Melford, up the river from here. He and Ebenezer Woodman, long ago, were the first ones to get land in the Western Reserve. 'We must hang on to that land, Eben; it will make our grandchildren rich,' he used to say.

"'Maybe,' says Ebenezer, 'but it won't make *us* rich! We'll be in Heaven long before that.'

"'Yes,' said the Colonel, 'that's the Devil of it!'"

"I wish you would write that book!" urged Dale laughing.

Mr. Lowry shook his head.

"If my children had lived they might have cared enough to do something with my notes."

"I never knew that you had had children," said Dale, surprised.

"Three," said Mr. Lowry. "Two died before they were born. We thought we were going to keep the last one, but it only lived three months. My wife got discouraged after that."

"Tell me about your wife."

"She was a little woman." Mr. Lowry spoke dreamily. "She dressed in gray, with gray bonnets. I don't see anything like them now-a-days; they set her face off like a frame. They had bows tied under the chin, and a white feather or ribbon, and sometimes pink flowers in summer. She left those off after a while. That was my fault.

"I meant to make her happy. I certainly thought we were going to be happy; but I didn't know anything about women. It is strange, isn't it, that a man would not expect to make a success of his business unless he had learned something about it beforehand, but when it comes to marriage any fool is clever enough for that? They have teachers for everything now, from playing whist to bringing up children, but I never heard of any one's lecturing upon the Art of Being a Husband. Even if he did, men would be ashamed to own that there was anything they did not know.

"She was not like my mother. She was pale and timid, with very bright eyes. She had a quick, light step. She was very shy of every one. There is a little mouse that comes out in my office sometimes for crumbs, when I am alone. It scampers away if any

one comes in, and then steals out afterward, and watches me, and watches me, but I can't get it to come near enough for me to put my hand on it. My wife was like that.

"She never would take a prominent place. If anything went on at the church, I always found her in a corner, talking to people of no consequence. I did not like it. I was not effective myself, and I wanted her to be so for both of us. Many a time that little frail woman would be on her feet all the afternoon, and then at five o'clock Mrs. Pons and Mrs. Hitchcock would sail into the church parlors like a ship with her convoy, and carry off all the credit. I would tell her to be more self-assertive, and not allow herself to be imposed upon, but it was always the same. She couldn't act as if she felt herself to be one of the best. She always wanted some one to wait on. If I asked where anything was, she would drop everything, and run up-stairs for it.

" 'Why don't you tell me where things are, instead of running all over the house?' I scolded, but she never got over it. There is no one to wait on me now, if I wanted it.

"After we lost our last child she cried so much that it made her deaf. She grew more afraid of people then. She would run up-stairs instead of answering the bell, if she saw any one coming. She would not go anywhere, unless I urged it. I did not mean to be irritable, but it vexed me to see her so nervous, with her fingers twisting in and out. 'Why can't you ask people what they said, if you don't understand?' said I. What do you think she answered? She said, all shaking and ready to cry: 'I would not mind asking over if

I was sure I should hear, the second time!' I understand that now; I didn't then. So I got out of the way of explaining anything, because she pretended she understood when she did not. We used to sit at opposite sides of the room without talking; there seemed to be nothing important enough to talk about. I was a fool. That was my chance to show what a good husband I could be, but I let it slip, and now I can never make up for it. There is nothing that cannot be got around if you only care enough. I have been a failure in everything. I tell you, it is not a man's crimes that damn him; it is his mistakes. There is no place of repentance for mistakes.

"At last she went into a decline. I remember I used to go out to the barn and fuss around, so that she would not see that I had been crying. Sometimes I think that it might have been better if she had seen me cry. She acted brighter in some ways, those last few months. She always said she was better. I don't know whether she thought she was or not. I don't know any more about her than I did before I married her. I was not cut out to make her happy. Most likely she sees how it was, now, if she is alive at all, and hasn't forgotten all about me."

Dale made two strides to the bed, and sat on it. Leaning over, he pinned the pillow down at either side of the old man's face with his warm young hands.

"What do you talk such stuff as that for?" he demanded, choking a little. "Have *you* forgotten?"

Mr. Lowry looked past him without answering. He intercepted the look, and recoiled, such an abyss it opened of loneliness and arid regret.

"No," said Mr. Lowry, "I haven't forgotten," and he put the tip of one finger to his eyes.

"Neither has she."

"Do you think she cares for me now?"

"I am certain of it."

"How do you know?"

"Love is identity. It cannot be lost. It is the only thing that can bridge the space between this world and the other."

"It isn't the other world that I care about," said Mr. Lowry. "I don't take much stock in heaven. I want to see my wife come into the room in her gray dress and bonnet; and then, be better to her."

"And what is that but heaven?" said Dale, under his breath. He dropped his head on his hand. "Spiritual diagnosis," indeed!

A breeze loaded with honeysuckle crept in stealthily through the half-closed blinds. It had a piercing sweetness. The room had grown dark.

"Ma-mie? You must come in now," called a voice in the street below.

"These things are all far-off to you," said Mr. Lowry in a low tone, "but they are terribly real to me. I am the last of my family. The friends I had when I was a boy are all gone, and I have no power to make new ones. There is nothing in me to attract other human beings. I cannot even tell any one how lonely I am. The village has its own idea of me, and I act up to it rather than show myself as I am. There is a little chap who patters into my office barefoot, sometimes, and stands grinning at me. He has lost two teeth, and it gives him a roguish look. I make an excuse to send him on an errand, so as to give him a

penny. He trots along beside me, and lisps when he answers; but if I take his hand he doesn't hold tight; doesn't quite know what the old fellow is, you see. If I had a child of my own I should get around that; I can't. So I go hungry, hungry as a tiger, just for a little everyday liking such as a man like you can command without asking, because he is young. There is no place in this country for the old. I am a rock left high and dry on some beach where nothing ever comes. The tide went out a long time ago."

"But the tide comes back," said Dale.

"Not for me."

"Yes," said Dale. "No power on earth can prevent the turn of that tide! Do you want it to come back? Do you want more sweetness in your life? Ask for it! Ask God for something!"

He felt the loose-skinned hand twitch under his.

"You ask," said Mr. Lowry.

The minister dropped to his knees.

CHAPTER TWENTY - THREE

“GORDON!”

Mr. Lowry rapped feverishly at the door. It was thrown open immediately.

“Was that the fire-bell?”

“Yes. Four strokes,” Dale replied, hopping across the room for his other shoe.

“Railroad Alley. It may be down by the Dairy. Wait for me; I must go with you.”

Dale put an arm affectionately around his shoulders.

“You know you are not fit. I will send some of the boys up to tell you where it is.”

“If it should be anywhere near the Town Hall let me know at once, at once! Promise!”

“I will;” and, seizing his hat, Dale dashed into the street behind other running figures. It was ten o'clock of a Saturday night, and the stores had not been closed long. Gaslights flickered in them as he passed. Men were unlocking doors, and snatching the covers from their goods, while women ran up and down the tenement stairs overhead. Below, at the foot of the hill, a crowd of those who had nothing at stake had gathered, and from around the corner came the steady chug-chug of the fire engine. There was a pungent smell of burning wood mingled with that other smell of water laid on hot dust. As he pressed forward for a sight of the doomed building, a man touched his arm.

"Very bad fire, I think," said Paul.

"Yes," answered Dale, seeing that it was likely to spread to the block beyond. "Paul, will you help me? There is work to be done."

Paul turned quickly with him toward the milliner's little shop. All was dark inside.

"Her building is insured, but not her stock," Dale explained, as if Paul could understand, and shook the door. It was locked. Paul pushed him aside.

"I do that," said he, grinning broadly. With a shove of his powerful shoulder, the door crashed inward. Dale tore down the shade, and discovered that there was no oil in the lamp. He carried some pasteboard boxes to the street-light and opened them. They held bonnets. Going behind the counter, he drew forth a drawer from its grooves in the wall, opened the show-case, and, more by feeling than by sight, packed it deftly with ribbon and flowers, laid a sheet of paper on top, and reached for another. Paul held out his arms for more. Loaded to the chin, they hurried to a spot on the Green remote from the confusion, to lay their burdens on the grass.

"If I only had some one to take charge at this end," he said, aloud.

"Would I do?" asked a voice at his side. Dale started.

"Miss DeForest! Are you out alone?"

"I could not stay indoors. Whose things are these? Mrs. Wheeler's? I am so glad, for she is out of town. How are you, Paul? It is good of you to help."

Paul smiled and nodded. His face was bright.

The street was full of rumbling noises. Once the silhouette of Sentinel Hill leaped into view in the

unnatural light. The wind, which had blown in lazy puffs, freshened; if it rose, the fire would sweep Market Street. Shirley tied the ends of her scarf around her throat, and leaned against a tree, glancing at the débris of a feeble business at her feet. That was what she was good for, she thought, not without scorn,—to tarry by the stuff while men worked.

“Do you think it would do to dump these right on the grass? They have a bony structure,” said Dale’s voice in her ear.

She could not repress a laugh. He had run a cord through the tapes of a dozen boxes, and strung them about him, while the drawer he held was piled with skeleton bonnets. There was exhilaration in his eye, in spite of his grave face.

“The Savings Bank has caught. The firemen are trying to pump from the river, but the hose is short. It is well the fire started no later; every one is out safely, I think. Why do people throw their looking-glasses out of the window to save them? Mrs. Duffy left her parrot on the sidewalk, and some one has stolen it. I wonder who would have the nerve to steal a parrot with such a yell?” He looked at her with an imploring frown that meant: “Laugh!” She did so.

“I wonder if Ruth will understand him when he is in that mood?” she thought.

The Savings Bank burned sullenly; the pall of smoke dropped lower. Express carts were hastily loaded. From time to time shadowy figures dashed across the Green and added their armfuls of goods to the disorderly heaps accumulating at various stations. Presently Shirley saw at a distance two large lamps, like the round, unwinking eyes of a demon, moving

down-hill. The Gilmores' Panhard swept across the head of Main Street, and down its left hand roadway.

"Papa, there is Shirley!" exclaimed Ruth. She beckoned, but Shirley called in answer:

"I am doing picket duty here."

Ruth jumped out, followed by her father. Mr. Gilmore had exchanged his Tuxedo jacket for a grey sack coat of his gardener's, which dragged across his expansive chest by one button, leaving his gold studs visible above and below. The pockets held packing-moss and a ball of twine; the latter, having snared itself around a friendly button, bobbed behind him.

"We did not hear the fire-bell, and we telephoned into town to know what the commotion was about," said he. "Looks bad, doesn't it? May I leave my girl with you, Miss Shirley? I want to be in the thick of it."

"Go, Papa, I will stay here — ah, the sparks — look! It is wildly exciting! Is that you, Mr. Dale?" For Dale and Enovitch returned just then with their last load.

"Well, what is the situation?"

"Worse," answered Dale, briefly. "They have wired to Carbury for help."

"Then I'll tell you what we will do. Feldhusen's bakery is out of the fire range, isn't it? We will tell him to send over coffee and sandwiches when they get in. They will be glad enough to get it if this keeps on all night. I'll foot the bill. Whose stuff is that?"

"Mrs. Wheeler's."

"That rubbish? I should think it was hardly worth saving," said Ruth, carelessly.

"It is all that stands between her and ruin," said Dale, biting his lip. Shirley felt a quick sympathy. How wealth crowded! Thrusting its own standards into every situation, seeing and doing everything in masses.

Dale did not look in her direction. Ruth stood in the midst of the group. She had thrown a long cloak of her favorite tan color over her evening gown. The lurid glow, which took the color out of the grass, only served to throw her marvelous pink and white tints into relief. In that strange light the want of finish in her features was forgotten. She looked like an amber witch.

"That alters the case," she said, more softly.

"Well, I'm off. No millinery for me. I'm the 'man with the hose'; mark 'im!" and Mr. Gilmore was lost in the night.

"Now we must try to find some better asylum for these goods, for Miss DeForest has been standing too long already."

"My house is the safest place, if we can get them there," suggested Shirley, doubtfully. Ruth interposed.

"Just bring one of those long cases this way, Mr. Dale. The back seat, yes. Now another one on top of it. You will have to get in yourself, to hold them steady." In a few minutes they had filled the car to overflowing.

"It resembles a ship of state," Dale remarked.

"Do you trust the pilot?" asked Ruth, in mischievous challenge.

Dale waved his hand.

"Sail on," he said.

Ruth looked over her shoulder. She was in a mood of the wildest excitement.

"If I bring you to grief going around the corner will you forgive me?"

"I will forgive you if you don't break your neck," he answered, trying to read her face; his own was drawn. Ruth laughed under her breath.

Paul walked humbly behind Shirley.

"She wass his lover, I think?"

Her voice was low and kind, like some instrument touched in the dark.

"You love him, don't you?"

"He wass my friend," answered Paul, simply. "I wass in jail. I knew nothing. There wass no one to care. Then he came, and I wass free. He wass my friend."

Together they ran up and down the flights of steps until their task was finished. Then Dale turned to Ruth.

"Before I leave you, Miss Gilmore, I should be glad if you would promise me not to try to navigate the ship through Main Street again."

"Was not the voyage successful?"

"Yes, but there is too great a crowd; it is unsafe. Promise to stay here with Miss DeForest until the excitement is over."

"But I like the excitement! I like to see them running around like ants when their hill is disturbed."

"Miss Gilmore," said Dale, sharply, "this fire is not a variety show for your entertainment."

She glanced up at him perversely.

"There are men in that crowd who are watching the savings of years go up in smoke; there are others

who may have to borrow money to go on. It hurts to lose money! If you irritate a single person to-night by the contrast between their position and your own, you are less a woman than a child playing with symbols which it does not understand."

"Thank you for the sermon," said Ruth, with a little courtesy. A provoking smile played on her lips, but her eyes said, "Forgive. You ought —" He saw the smile. In desperation he thrust her hand into Shirley's.

"Take care of her!"

"I will."

For an instant the three hands touched. The automobile lamps shone on the two women's faces. Dale looked dazzled. He lifted his hat and walked away, Paul trotting after him. They had reached the opposite curbstone when a tottering figure carrying a huge folio in both arms like a baby jostled them.

"Mr. Lowry! You ought not to be here."

"The records, man, the records!" exclaimed Mr. Lowry, distractedly. "They will be gone forever in an hour if I don't get them out. I can't get help; I've offered any price. All they think of is their *stock*!" He danced up and down, looking for a safe place to lay down the book.

"The Town Hall is not in danger yet."

"The danger is in the rear. Some of those partitions are only lath and plaster, and if that extension behind the hotel catches — I can't stop to talk!" and he led the way with febrile energy to the back room, where an electric light outside shone in the window.

"Not those; the old ones!" he shouted. "The third shelf, right at your hand. I thought it out years ago. Here, I can carry more;" but he had not made

many trips before his strength failed him, and he was forced to sit on the grass. A strong arm hoisted him, and Paul carried him on his back to the band-stand, and set him down gently.

"I think it was better here," said he, patting him on the shoulder, and laughing happily. "I bring all. You wait."

"Good fellow, nice fellow," said the town clerk, as if he had been a Newfoundland dog.

They found him on his knees feeling among the volumes.

"There is one missing — 1741 — the binding rolls up on the corner. I wouldn't lose it for a thousand dollars. Hark! What is that?"

It was the Carbury engine, rattling into the village. It arrived at a dramatic moment, and was greeted with cheers.

"They are going to play at the Main Street corner; it will save the street," said Shirley, as a well-directed stream of water struck the corner block.

"And Hamlet marches coolly in and out of the Town Hall," said Ruth, with an excited laugh. "I know him by his walk; do you?"

"Yes," answered Shirley, quietly.

"He was so vexed with me!"

"Why did you vex him?" asked Shirley, as if she did not know what contrary impulses can sway a girl who is not ready to surrender. Yet she thought she knew Ruth.

"Am I to let him manage me?" asked the girl, wilfully. "Why, I could tell him things about himself — oh, look at that — isn't it glorious?"

Glorious! The other shuddered.

Long did the two remember their strange vigil. It seemed as if they had sat on those steps for years. For it was the middle of the night, and the fire had not been checked.

Suddenly, without warning, a dense cloud of smoke poured from the second-story window of the Town Hall. The dark building was brightly illuminated from the rear. The crowd hurried to the corner.

"Shirley, I don't see Mr. Dale," said Ruth presently, in a trembling voice. Shirley was silent. She had already noticed that he was missing.

"He was standing on the sidewalk just a little while ago. If the smoke would only lift so that I could see! They are calling something; what is it? What is that fireman running so for? . . . *They are inside!*"

She sprang up wildly, and drew her cloak about her.

"What are you going to do, Ruth?"

"I am going across to find out what has happened."

"You must not go! I promised to take care of you. It is no place for you in that crowd."

"Do you think I care for that?" asked Ruth.

Shirley caught her around the waist.

"He left you in my charge. You shall not stir one step."

"I must! It is for — oh, don't you understand?"

But Shirley's hand, once so gentle, had gripped her arm in such determination that she could have cried out for the pain. They wrestled in silence. Ruth weakened first, and stood shivering, awe-struck, frightened.

Did Shirley know what she did? She saw another scene: An open hatchway where smoke curled up from below, forms stumbling up to the berth deck, bearing

between them a helpless something with hands hanging down that would never again be raised in salute. Across the dark chamber of her brain old words trailed redly: "My dear Mr. DeForest, it is with heartfelt sorrow that I write to inform you of the death of your son. . . . He was a fine officer, and a very noble gentleman . . . in keeping with the best traditions of the Service. Permit me —"

Her whole being rose in furious rebellion. She cried out in herself as if against some Moloch which would not be appeased without more sacrifice: "Let him live! He is too young! Take me — my barren life. Is not one enough? Let him live!"

And still the maddening swish of water struck the walls, and the engine went on throbbing.

There was a swaying movement in the crowd, and it parted. Two firemen came out, dragging a heavy burden. Ruth moaned. Shirley could have struck her, the sound smote her nerves so. Then in the sudden hush, they heard a terrible sound, — the sound of an old man's broken sobs.

"Oh, if he is dead!" whispered Ruth, shaking from head to foot.

"If he is dead, he has died like a noble gentleman," said Shirley in a hard voice. Unconsciously she echoed those words.

"Oh, how can you speak like that? Shirley! Shirley!"

Turning, Ruth laid her head on her shoulder, and wept passionately. Shirley stood still. All she felt was that the girl's weight was intolerably heavy, that she could not endure it another moment.

She led her into the house, and while Ruth flung

herself upon the sofa, she arranged the boxes of ribbons with that exaggerated care which one bestows upon trifles when some blow has fallen. Nothing was too bad to happen. Moloch had not heard, that was all.

A burly form showed itself at the foot of the steps. "Are you both there?" asked Mr. Gilmore's voice.

Shirley went to meet him. Her little figure looked very erect standing there in the porch.

"She is lying down in the parlor," she said. "Do not try to break it to her gently, do not bend over her, nor kiss her. Tell her in so many words that he is dead, and then go and leave her to herself."

"What are you talking about?" said Mr. Gilmore. "About Dale? Do you mean that my girl thinks —?"

Ruth had run out and thrown herself between her father and Shirley. "Is he dead, Papa?" she whispered, striving to draw him away.

"Dead? Not a bit of it!" he replied, cheerfully. "Why, bless me, what a fright you girls have had! He would have been dead if they had not found him when they did, for he had lost his bearings in the hall, trying to drag the other fellow out with him. *He* was dead fast enough, poor devil! They had to drag them out together. Dale would not give up his hold although he was almost gone."

Shirley sat down hastily in one of the veranda chairs. She heard Mr. Gilmore's voice as from a long way off.

"It was a pitiful thing to hear old Lowry crying. They had to hold him back by main force from going into the building. He said he had murdered him. No one thought old Lowry had any more feeling in him than a codfish. Miss Shirley, will you give me a bite

to eat? There was plenty of stuffing going around, but I was too busy to stop. I've been having the time of my life!"

He was dripping wet, even to his shoes, which crunched water at every step. Some one had planted four muddy fingers on his white shirt, where bits of florist's moss clung lovingly. He wiped his red face; a square-jawed, good-natured face, and a comforting one to look at just then.

"Better let Ruth stay with you the rest of the night," said he, when he had finished his impromptu meal.

"It is good of you to think of me," said Shirley, gratefully.

"I forgot to fill your pitcher," she said, later, coming into Ruth's room. She had taken off her dress, and Ruth looked at her as if she had never seen her before. For she herself was but an angular schoolgirl without her beloved chiffons, but Shirley's round slenderness left not a bone visible, and her full throat was proud and white. Ruth drew her sleeve over her arm. Not for worlds would she have let Shirley see those black and blue marks. She cherished the hurt, with the strange, unripe passion of a girl for an older woman.

"Shirley? I wish you would kiss me once," she pleaded.

To her surprise, Shirley's eyes filled with tears, and she kissed her on both cheeks, tenderly, exquisitely.

"Good night, dear. Thank you for your love."

"She understands," thought Ruth.

But long after Ruth had fallen asleep, Shirley lay awake, as weak as a child, and as humble. Tears

rose to her eyes, one after another, and she brushed them away.

“It is gone — that dreadful numbness,” she said to herself. “I do not care what happens to me. I am alive; I can feel!”

CHAPTER TWENTY - FOUR

MONDAY evening, at sunset, the minister mounted the steps of The Terrace. His cheeks were scorched a deep red, and he carried his right arm in a sling. From the porch, he could see, near the soldiers' monument, piles of goods covered with tarpaulin and placarded. Lutz, the barber, had already leased the band-stand for business.

Almost immediately Shirley answered his ring. She led the way into the parlor on the left of the hall. The leaves outside made a green twilight within. A pair of girandoles gave out transient gleams, and beneath them, on either side of the fireplace, were the tall vases Lieutenant DeForest had brought from China. There was a faint odor of sandal-wood. The room seemed full of the grace of a day that was dead.

"I feared you were ill, since you were not out yesterday," Dale began.

"I was not ill. I was spent. A fire is dreadful to me."

"I know," he said, quickly.

"And then, Paul . . . poor fellow!"

"Yes." He drew in his breath sharply.

There was a moment's silence.

"I have seen Mrs. Wheeler," said Dale, abruptly.
"She has been offered a fair price for her lot, but she is inclined to rebuild, if she can only find a room

to rent in the meantime, to keep on with her business."

"She can rent my other parlor," answered Shirley, promptly. "I need the money as much as she needs the room. I have let my pride rule me long enough, I think."

It is one of the perversities of life that when we have done our best to set things right, they seem to have been so much nicer before!

"Do you need the money very much?" he asked, at last. "Don't think I mean to ask prying questions, but—I wish you would trust me!"

"That is nice of you," said Shirley, heartily. "I shall always be poor, for I was not brought up to aim at money, but I have done without things I might have had because I liked to feel myself superior to material wants. That is weakness, too, I suppose."

"You have not answered my question," said Dale.

His persistence surprised her. He looked care-worn and languid. She liked him better like that. She answered with a child's candor.

"I have enough."

"Honest?"

"Yes. Do not worry about me. The DeForest ship is snaking along at four or five knots an hour, but there are no breakers ahead."

"I hope not." He got up.

"I came partly to ask you if you would come to Paul's funeral to-morrow?"

"Certainly I shall. Where is it to be?"

"In the church, at two o'clock. Mr. Lowry pays the funeral expenses. Plenty of people will come out of

curiosity, but few will care." He made a move to go, and came back to the piano.

"Miss DeForest, have you a kind word for me? I need it!"

It touched her to the quick.

"How can I help you? Tell me! You are worn out."

He did not speak for a moment, and there was no sound in the room but his repressed breathing.

"I led the man to his death," he said, with head bowed. "He went because I did. It was like a dog's, his attachment to me. I—I have been annoyed by it at times; it made me feel ridiculous. I ought to have looked after him more carefully, but I was thinking of Mr. Lowry; his life is bound up in those records. It seemed to me that there was plenty of time, if we kept cool. Then, all in a moment, the smoke poured in. There was a current of fresh air near the floor. I told him to drop on his hands and knees and crawl to the door . . . he could not understand . . . he would not stir without me . . . I had to throw him down. He struggled with me! He thought—ah! he thought I meant to leave him, to sacrifice him. He died thinking that. If I could only tell him!"

"He will never need to be told," she answered. "Whatever form life takes hereafter wrong will not prevail, not even wrong judgments."

"Do you believe it? If there were no platitudes to take refuge in, would you still believe it?"

"How else am I to live?" she asked, passionately. "Unless I can think that there are forces at work rebuilding life as strong as those that will put one brick on top of another in Market Street, what is the

use of anything? I cannot live in things; it is not enough."

"No, it is not enough." He was silent a moment.

"I fail at every turn. I am a failure," he murmured, as if to himself.

"Oh, no! You are not a failure." Shirley's heart beat faster, for he had never let go of himself like this before. "Do you know what Paul said to me Saturday night? He said: 'I was in jail. He came, and I was free. He was my friend.'"

"Did he say that? You see . . . that was the one idea he had, and as for giving him new ones — I ought to have done more for him before it was too late!"

Shirley caught his free hand in both of hers with fearless sympathy.

"Oh, you put me out of patience! You big boy! Just as if he had not gone straight back . . . just as if it were not the biggest thing of all to have taught him. If he learned from you what it meant to have a friend, do you think it will be hard to make him understand?"

"But I — was not — Christ," said Dale in a low tone. It had grown too dark for her to see his face, but his voice sounded terribly moved.

"You were, to him, a little. You cared."

"Yes, I cared," he said, somberly, "but not enough! I could take these people's souls up in my hands, like children, and set them down other than I found them, if I cared enough! Do you know what it is to see your goal in a dream, and feel that something holds you back? Something holds me back!"

"Better that than to be content," she replied, steadily.

His eyes filled at that. Standing beside him in the doorway, she could see their glitter. He started to go, looked around awkwardly for a place to lay his hat, and brushed his free hand across his eyes. With that simple action he brushed away the last of Shirley's mental reservations. For a self-conscious manner can be outgrown, but a pinchbeck nature remains pinchbeck to the end of the chapter.

How he had hung on her words! "Every one comes to you," he had said once. He had come to her, not to Ruth, whom he loved. It was not the first time men had done that, but she had always played fair. She had paid too much for any power she had not to play fair. She thought of the proud years, when she had fancied all life was hers for the grasping; of those other years, when she had rebelled, and borne, and been benumbed. Now, like some plant after a long night's rain, she raised her head meekly, and, after all, the air was sweet! What did she ask of life? Only, in this starved existence of a middle-class town, to speak sometimes with another soul face to face. So little it takes to make a woman happy who has got over demanding happiness as her debt.

The single carriage which wound its way through the cemetery that afternoon was followed by a number of people. It was not a pauper funeral; Dale himself had paid for the plot of ground near two or three graves marked only by flags. When the service was over, he took a sheaf of wild lilies from the sexton, and beckoned to some one who stood watching, a little way off.

Granny Akers was surprised at herself for being there. She hated funerals. She would not have ad-

mitted that the solemn words, so long unheard that they fell on her ear with the force of novelty, impressed her. What she did realize was that it was exciting to be among people. In throwing over forms and habitudes she had also thrown over her social instincts.

The minister beckoned, and she drew near, a half-tamed creature, opposition in her eye.

"Thank you for the flowers, Mrs. Akers. I should be glad of your help with them."

At once she seated herself on the grass, waiting for the earth to be shoveled into the grave.

"You got burned, didn't you?" she asked, shyly.

"It will heal." Dale nodded in another direction, where a spot of bright color showed on the turf.

"May I tell Mr. Lowry who takes so much care of his wife's grave?"

Her withered face turned red, like a winter apple.

"Don't you, Mr. Dale. He wouldn't understand. It wasn't for her so much; it was for some one else. I went to school with her. Her name was Lucy, Lucy Bennitt. She died fifty years ago. I never saw her grave, it's too far away, so I just picked out one to do for, as if it was hers. Lucy thought everything of flowers, and she'd understand."

"I think I do, too. Was Mrs. Lowry at all like her?"

"Yes, they were some alike, and Mrs. Lowry was always real pleasant to me, and that was why I chose her. She spoke soft like Lucy. Lucy's 'ceased to be . . . rolled round in earth's diurnal course, with rocks, and stones, and trees.'" The old woman spoke with dramatic emphasis; she might have been Atropos herself, brooding on the ground.

"And the friendship that remembers after fifty years, what of that?"

Her face twitched.

"I don't know! I don't know!"

"There was once a man whose dearest friend died young, but fifty years after, he had not forgotten. When he was an old man he wrote down his friend's last words. They were: 'I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am you may be also.'"

"Why, that's — in the Bible," said Granny Akers.

"Yes," said Dale, in a tone that was keen, almost bitter; "nevertheless, it really happened."

At the gate he paused.

"Mrs. Akers, if you knew how I long to help my people to live in the spirit, you would try to help me." He lifted his hat, and walked abruptly away.

Granny Akers was startled. Human feeling did not often choose her as an object to break upon. There was more than emotion in his tone, there was a confession of weakness. The minister had shown himself equal to occasions, before; she supposed he was always so, — that was his business.

"What difference does it make to him what an old woman like me thinks?" she soliloquized. "What makes him care so, anyway? We ain't worth it."

Granny Akers would have been a curious study for a psychologist. Thwarted in youth, brought up by soured and joyless women, she had externally conformed to pressure until her habits had apparently become fixed. Then, when that pressure was removed, the being within had become conscious of itself, and she had reverted to what she had been as a child. Dale had been right in calling her "a little girl." Her

married life had been a mere episode; but the feelings, the impressions, the sensations which the adolescent girl had experienced were as sharp as ever. Hence she did not age; it was only the husk of the nut that was withered. Enough for her that the sand violets on the opposite slope streaked the May grass with blue; that the katydid's strident chirp filled her with delight; that apples, hot with the sun, were hers for the stooping; that skies were clear, and winds were sweet, and every sense rejoiced.

Yet, as she entered her pantry that evening to forage for her supper, she felt besieged by unknown forces. It was a little place, full of old flavors, — cheese, and rye flour, and soap. The young moon made a shadow of leaves on the white-washed wall. Sharp as their outline was, the sensation they gave her was sharper. It was the ghost of the ideal lying there. She felt haunted.

"It's too bright!" she whispered to herself. "It makes me think of the time Lucy and I ran away to the Nine Mile Woods. The moon came out just like that, and we cuddled up together on a stone, and I put my cape around us both. Fifty years. I shouldn't have told any one but him, but he knows you don't forget. I wish I knew!"

CHAPTER TWENTY - FIVE

A DAY or two later Dale was passing his neighbor's window when a voice hailed him from within.

"Come in! Come in!" called Mr. Lowry.

He was turning the sitting-room where Mrs. Purple had ruled so long into a book-stack, for the town records had been brought to his house for safe-keeping. He had a skull cap on the back of his head, and he was whistling as he arranged the temporary shelves. The excitement of the fire had made him stronger.

"Let me help; they are heavy," said the younger man, stooping for a volume.

"Not a bit of it," said Mr. Lowry. "I've got them all here, the old ones, that is. The last ones have gone up in smoke. Perhaps the town will do something now; I mean to try again. And I have begun my history at last. It is over there on the table."

Dale bent to read the sentence on the sheet of foolscap.

"Such was the beginning of the plantation in the wilderness, which was destined to play no small part in the history of Connecticut."

"Capital!" said he. "Where is the beginning?"

"Oh, I haven't got to that yet!" said Mr. Lowry. "I've struck in where I could get hold of it, just as you told me. I am going to write an account of the first fourteen settlers next; that will be smooth sailing."

Dale went on up the hill to Oak Lodge. Mr. Gilmore was in, the maid told him, and showed him to the loggia at the back of the house. Surely the mind had well planned, that framed that large picture between massive posts and beams. The river churned its gold-brown into muddy white where it swept around the point of the mountain. The Torch's bulk loomed large and blue; that meant rain.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Dale," said Ruth's voice.

He started to his feet. He had not heard her approach. Her embroidered grass linen with its pale gold sash carried a scent of perfumed woods in its folds. She advanced toward him with that forward-swaying movement of her narrow shoulders which just escaped being awkward. There was no sign of that night's hysterical weeping in her insouciant face; but, then, Dale had not seen those tears.

"Papa will be in soon," she explained. "Something went wrong with the hydraulic ram, and he is trying to tinker it himself. Is it etiquette to shake hands with one's left hand when the right hand has been disabled on the field of battle? We will pretend it is, anyway. How does it feel to be a hero?"

"Ask the Carbury Company," he answered, coloring a little.

"They worked splendidly; but I don't call that heroism, pouring water on buildings. That was their business," said Ruth, superbly.

"I see; you would have them do what is not their business?" He was smiling at the indirect flattery, which had its full effect upon him, nevertheless. That new softness was bewitching.

"No; to do more!" Her voice dropped. "Did

you know that you had hold of him when they brought you out? They tried to make you let go, but you would not, even when you had lost your senses — what is it? What have I said?” for his free hand went up to his forehead suddenly. “It is too much for you; it brings it back?”

“Yes,” he owned, gratefully.

“Then we will not say any more about it. I only wanted to tell you that I — was sorry;” and she looked at him with such fearless frankness that his whole being went out to it in salute. It was like a treaty of peace after border skirmishes. It rested him.

“Has Mrs. Wheeler taken away her dreadful bonnets yet?” Ruth inquired, after a short silence.

“No, she — I believe Miss DeForest has rented the room to her to keep on with her business.”

Ruth sat upright in consternation.

“For a shop? That horrid little millinery store? You must be mistaken. Shirley is too proud; she would never consent.”

“She has consented,” he replied, feeling guilty for some unknown reason.

“Cannot you stop her from doing it?” said Ruth, impetuously. “You do not mean that she — needs the money?”

“I am afraid so.”

“Then why do you — why don’t you do something?” She hurled the question at him. He did not reply at once. He leaned forward, tracing the pattern of the rug with his walking-stick. The attitude cut off a view of his face.

“You speak as if being poor were the unbearable calamity,” he said. “There are worse things.”

"Yes," she agreed, with bitterness, "it is worse to have thousands of your own, and not be able to lift a finger to save your friend. If Shirley were in my place she could do it; she would have her own way, just as she does now; but I am another person! It is an insult for me even to offer it; it is only to be tolerated because I am not a person of fine feelings, and consequently cannot be expected to show any delicacy. I could bear that, if she would only let me help her!"

"You slander yourself when you say that you have no fine feelings," said Dale, strongly moved. "You are one of the most loyal girls I ever met. But Miss De-Forest —" he stumbled over the name — "has lived a lonely life, and if she is willing to help along the social order just now by giving up part of her house I do not see why any one should object."

"Yes, I might have known it was your doing," said Ruth, hotly. "You have worked on her until you have made her think she ought to sacrifice something more, as if she had not sacrificed enough already! She had everything once. She has lost her family, she has lost her money, and now she has lost the only thing that was left to her, that lovely old house, — and she loves it so! Don't you know that there are creatures that, if you break their shell, will creep into a corner of it and die? You have broken her shell!"

"I give you my word, I never even suggested the plan," he remonstrated. He had grown very pale.

"It is your doing, all the same. Your theories of the 'social order.' Why don't you keep that phrase for the pulpit? You go around trying to do good; you like to think that you have influence. The way to do people good is to understand them! If you under-

stood her you would — oh, I have no patience with you! Pray do you think we are all pawns on a chess-board for you to move around? ”

“ I have certainly never entertained such an idea in regard to you, Miss Gilmore! ” Dale was cruelly stung.

“ You’d better not! ” she retorted, and then the tears crowded into her forget-me-not eyes, she gave a sniffing little sob, and sprang to her feet. He followed suit, and they regarded each other in mutual dismay. Dale spoke first.

“ We seem to be always quarreling, ” he said, unsteadily.

“ I can’t help it, ” she said, with some pathos. “ I’d like to shake you! Oh, if I could only give you a little common sense! ” and she vanished abruptly, just as Mr. Gilmore came around the corner of the loggia. Dale hastily pulled himself together.

“ Ah, Dale, there you are. I told Ruth to look after you until I was out of the woods. Where is she? Have some Apollinaris? Nora, bring some Apollinaris. How are they getting on down street? Insurance claims adjusted yet? ”

“ Not fully. Mrs. Wheeler will not be able to collect the full amount of her insurance, it seems, because I used the drawers in the store to carry her goods out in. They have made too heavy a discount, I think. ”

“ If all the inside fittings had been burned, she would have got the whole. ”

“ Unfortunately, I did not know that. A man in my profession ought to know a little of everything, or he is sure to make mistakes. ”

“ That’s true enough. If he doesn’t know the ropes

they think him a Nanny; if he goes butting up against them they call him a goat. How is Lowry?"

"Surprisingly better, strange to say."

"Not at all. People go moping around without energy, but give them a fire, or a death, or a big disaster that wipes out hundreds of lives, and presto! they are as lively as crickets."

"It would have killed him, I think, if the records had been burned. His life is bound up in the town history; and that reminds me of the object of my visit. Is it true that Mr. Baker has leased the Indian burying-ground from you, to put up a tobacco barn?"

"Something was said about it in the spring."

"Has there been any contract, may I ask?"

"No, not yet."

"Then I wish you would ask him to find another lot, Mr. Gilmore."

"Why?"

"Because that ground is one of the few landmarks left in town, and a barn would not only be an eyesore there, but it would spoil the mounds. They are the best preserved of any in the State. To level them, and cut down that grove, would advertise to all who go through the valley that our reverence for the past is being destroyed by the spirit of commercialism."

"If you think Waukomis cares for that, you are mistaken," said Mr. Gilmore. "I am not responsible for the spirit of commercialism. There will be facilities here for a good many more people when the street is rebuilt; but one faction opposes progress because its own pockets are filled, and the other faction wants to run a trolley line through Main Street, and put up showy buildings that it can't pay for; and between them,

reverence for the past, as you call it, is out of sight."

"The more reason for saving what can be saved," said Dale, stubbornly. "That grove ought to belong to the town, to be a beauty spot forever."

A gray Angora cat picked her way across the rug to spring upon Mr. Gilmore's knee. He stroked her fur gently, and she stretched herself along his arm, purring.

"You wouldn't take my check," said he. "Not good enough for church repairs; but good enough for secular purposes, eh? A park, but not a church?" His hard tone was a challenge. In contrast, the hand which stroked the cat was caressing.

"Why should you wish to give to the church?" asked Dale, in reply. "When its principles have been taken seriously, they will make such deals as the business world sees to-day impossible."

"Your distinctions are too fine for me. I am not ruled by sentiment, as I said before. Shingles; dirt. One is religious, the other isn't. I can't see it. And I don't know that I care to be dictated to as to how or where I shall give away my money."

"The fault is mine if I have seemed to speak as a dictator," said Dale, rising. "I will bid you good afternoon." He was very tired, and his arm ached, but worst of all was the sense of being buffeted and beaten. "I am catching it all round," he said to himself, wearily.

"Sit down," answered Mr. Gilmore, laying a heavy hand on the chair just vacated, with such passive strength in his attitude that Dale obeyed before he thought. By sheer bulk this man controlled others.

"You called me mean once, do you remember?" he asked. "Well, sir, that rankled! I've been called hard names by many who would like to be in my shoes, but no one ever called me a mean man to my face before. I should like to know why you think me any worse than other men?"

"I did not say that."

"No, and you'll not have thought so, either; maybe. I've subscribed to more charities than I can count; my private life is straight. Your churches are full of men who look sharp to their own advantage, only they deal in tens while I deal in thousands. Now, this is what I have to say. I bought that lot for a song. To please you and Lowry I'll agree to turn it over to the town for a park, if you will agree to take back that word."

Dale was greatly surprised. A voice within argued: "Compromise. What have you gained in all these months? Secure something tangible; bend a little, and keep your influence over him by tact. You cannot afford to make him your enemy."

Then, as he looked up, unaware how long he had deliberated, he saw the older man waiting with bent head for his verdict, and realized on the instant that he cared. At once the temptation was lost in a rush of better feeling, and laying a hand on the other's knee he asked, warmly:

"Can't you make that word untrue, Mr. Gilmore?"

"Man, I wish I were young like you!" exclaimed Mr. Gilmore in an outburst of which he was rather ashamed. "I wouldn't try to be rich, I would try to be happy!"

"It is not too late for that now."

"Yes, it is. Happiness is wanting more than you can get, and thinking you are going to get it. When you have got it, or when you have lost your grip, what is there left? My gardener is happy because I let him have all the latest cannas. Next year it will be something else. But I haven't any hobbies; I wish I had. I can't collect coins, and I'm not fool enough to think I know anything about oil paintings. All I know is *men*; their ways, their schemes, their weak spots, and how to manage 'em. I can play that game well enough, for game it is; poker is nothing to it."

"I admit the intellectual enjoyment in such competition."

Mr. Gilmore shook his head slowly.

"It is not that I enjoy it so much; it's that I can't enjoy anything else. I am like that fellow Darwin, wasn't it? who couldn't keep his mind on poetry. If I am reading a book I keep my hand in at the back to feel how many pages are left. I am always listening for the telephone. I used to look forward to the day when I could do what I liked. I could start for Kamschatka now in half an hour, if I wanted to, — and I don't want to! Put yourself in my place — don't talk religion — what would you do to get more fun out of life, if you were me?"

"Cannot you limit yourself somehow?" asked Dale, thinking hard. "Stay in one place more; identify yourself with its life; take up obligations to others?"

"Why one place more than another?" asked Mr. Gilmore, and stuck out his lower lip like a bored child. "Of course, if my daughter were to marry and settle down anywhere, that would alter the case." He cast a shy look at the minister, for had not Shirley

DeForest, who was seldom mistaken, seemed to think that Ruth — well, liked him? “I am in no hurry to see her married, though. When she does marry I hope it will not be a rich man. If he has a steady head it will not hurt him to know that she has a tidy little fortune of her own.” He said no more; his heart was more delicate than his words.

A slight shadow had fallen over Dale’s face. He rose slowly, with an air of constraint.

“Miss Gilmore does not need a fortune to make her worth winning,” he answered. “She has a strong and loyal heart.”

Mr. Gilmore watched him disappear behind the plantation of white oaks.

“I hope Ruth can make him out,” he said to himself; “I can’t!”

CHAPTER TWENTY - SIX

IT happened, after all, that the barn was not built. Instead, the neglected grove was trimmed, and left to be a monument to a vanished race. The mounds were sown with new grass. Mr. Gilmore, strolling on the bluff, directed the work. His burly form was seen everywhere in those days. More than one man who had lost heavily in the fire had cause to thank him for timely help.

"The strange thing with men like him is that they have one code for individuals, and another for the crowd," David Kent remarked.

"The crowd breeds indifference," Dale answered. "Do you remember how Richard Jeffries stood before the Bank in London, watching men swarm like flies in the most crowded spot in the world? It seemed to him ignoble, yet he was one of them, and he was not ignoble. In a higher type of community we shall protect ourselves by more personality, not by less."

"Your 'solidarity' ideas have got a setback for the time, I fear."

Dale laughed.

"Our offerings are larger than they were before the fire; explain that if you can!"

He started to go, and came back.

"Kent?"

"Well?"

"I have been thinking over what you said once about man-made formulas, and trying to see if a sufficient creed cannot be made out of Christ's own words. I do not know whether it would be broad enough for you; no creed will ever be broad enough to please both those who do and those who do not accept those words as authoritative; but at least non-essential dogmas would not be lugged in. Will you look at it when I have finished it?"

"Yes."

"I wish you would." He hesitated, and then burst out almost boyishly: "David, in some ways you hinder me more than any man in this town!"

"Now, I wonder why he said that?" thought David Kent, when he was left alone; but he knew better than he admitted. It was the effect upon him of living among men of inferior caliber that he had grown more inclined to emphasize his points of difference than his points of agreement with them. He was an idealist turned wrong side out, and sometimes took a perverse pleasure in being misjudged; it served to protect his inner life. Existence was not the same thing to him as to those other men. What did he care for money-grubbing, gossip, and local campaigns? Living might be sordid enough, but life itself was as deep and strange as the sea, and as salt, and the sound of it was always in one's ears; and if there were those who claimed to discover a farther shore, he would not deny their vision, though what he saw was mist. Yet he was no pessimist; he could steer his little bark to the end with a light heart, — if only Ada cared!

He had not got over, he never would get over the disappointment of his marriage. That a frail little being

with dark shadows under her eyes and that pathetic smile should prove so untender was a marvel to him. Even her jealous fondness for Bertie was another form of self-love, and he had seen her use it to stab childless women. He had heard her ridicule others with the inordinate vanity which must always be first, the inability to sink gracefully into the background. He could not understand women who were constantly occupied with such instincts. He could understand them as cases, but not as women.

It had been his dream that some one would love him enough to care about his work. He remembered the first time that he had talked of it to her, letting himself out by degrees, as a man will, to see if he is safe. She had answered, as he thought then, with some interest and sympathy. It flattered her sense of power, that was all! Now, when he spoke of what was in his mind, it bored her. Once he had come home worn out from a forty-eight hours' case where he had saved both mother and child after a terrible struggle, to find her in one of those distant, mysterious moods which provoked questioning for the gratification of refusing to reply, until he had learned at last what the tragedy was: he had forgotten her birthday! Well, he had not meant to forget; but couldn't she enter into the thing at all? She had not even let him have his sleep out. That paper that was coming out in the Record — it had been a case of blood poisoning, and he had washed out the veins — he wasn't going to boast, but they had all gathered around him at the last county meeting. He had tried to tell Ada about it; but she had called the subject "perfectly horrid," and begged him not to "talk shop" at home. Shirley would care, bless

her! He must remember to tell her, the next time he went over.

Meanwhile, Shirley was experiencing the sting of returning life. She, who had lent herself patiently to the joys and sorrows of other people, was restless and irritable. She had felt with the mind, as a looker-on in life; now she began to crave something for herself. The tacit assumption on every one's part that she had no affairs of her own bored her. She longed for a more definite stake in life, for the society of women of her own sort, away from this village atmosphere, the literary club with its intellectual cold baked meats, the middle-aged matrons who had been careful to address her as Miss DeForest when she was eighteen, but who now patronized her ever so little as "Miss Shirley."

Ever since May's visit, she had been conscious of a growing ferment within. May's talk made her realize as never before the freedom of a modern woman, her variety of interests, her opportunity for close companionship. If she were to throw herself out into the world and try to find a niche, as May had suggested—but no, it was too late!

David joined her on her door-step one evening. He looked very tired as he seated himself beside her; the furrows in his brow were deeper than usual.

"Is Ada coming, too?" she asked, handing him a cushion.

"No, she has one of her headaches."

"She wants me to pull up stakes, and move to Burford, did you know it?" he said, presently. "She says she feels 'crushed,' living here out of the world. I

never knew before that she felt that way. She seemed to like it well enough at first."

("Oh, my dear, is she going to ruin your life?" thought Shirley, passionately.)

"Do not yield, David. You have the right to decide your own destiny."

"I shall have to yield if she goes on. You don't know how it is." He clasped his arms around his knees; the lean, powerful wrists were thrust out of his sleeves. The sight of them touched her with peculiar tenderness. Could not a man like him be happy?

"When the boy grows up of course he will leave it; but I meant to live and die in the place. There are only three men in this section who are my intellectual equals, and they are not near enough for easy consultation. The country needs trained men as much as it ever did. Look at it; no hospital within miles for an emergency case, and people on isolated roads who need to be taught how to live. Not that they follow my teaching," he added. "I'm not one of your breezy fellows with a soft voice and hand, and a heart well cased. I'm wrung with the needless suffering. It is not that life is hard, it ought to be hard; it's the poverty of life that downs me! Their commonplace, sterile, ill-nourished existences!"

"Not ill-nourished, David, while you are with them. You love them."

"To what end?"

" 'The blood of my passion
Works no redemption,' "

said David Kent, harshly.

"It helps me," was Shirley's answer.

He buried his face in his hands. He loved his wife, but this woman made him feel that his life was not all failure, since he had attained to her friendship. He never forgot the words. For that hour they sat there together, saying little, after the habit of old comrades. Had they known it, it was the last time.

Three days later, a note scribbled in pencil reached Shirley at her breakfast. "Bertie is very sick with membranous croup. Can you come over at once?"

Without waiting to find her hat, Shirley almost ran to the doctor's house, pushed open the screen door, and hurried up-stairs. Ada lay on a couch in the hall in a loose blue gown, one arm flung over her head. She opened and closed one eye without speaking, as Shirley passed on to the bedroom door. David met her. She had one glimpse of Bertie's chubby face looking old and strange, and his yellow hair tangled like corn silk.

"He was taken at six," Dr. Kent explained. "I was out half the night, and did not look at him when I came in. Yes, put on the apron. Now, watch him a minute while I look at my sterilizer. I have wired to Steel of Carbury; he's coming by this train. I am getting everything ready in case he thinks tracheotomy is necessary."

"Have you sent over for Dr. Sugden, too?"

"That fossil?" muttered Dr. Kent.

He showed her a bowl of sterilizing fluid, towels, and a little silver tube with its inner tube lying ready, and was back at the bedside, working over the child, sternly, rapidly, with lips compressed, while she obeyed his gestures, a lump in her own throat. The sound of

his voice saying, "Poor little chap! Papa's little chap!" was more than she could bear.

Presently, at the sound of wheels, he bolted to the door. Ada did not move. She was really exhausted, but she was also mindful of the picture she would make to the strange doctor in her abandonment.

But only the doctor's man ran up-stairs.

"He hasn't come, sir. And there was a telegram waiting for you."

"Blockhead! Why didn't you bring it at once?" exclaimed the doctor, tearing it open. He made a smothered sound.

"Sprained ankle on way to train. Regret exceedingly unable come. STEEL."

Ada had come to his side.

"David! What is it?"

His face was haggard.

"He can't come."

"Then send for Dr. Sugden. I want *some one*!"

"Too late," he answered, dashing into the bedroom again.

"There is no more time to lose. I must operate myself. Will you give the ether?" he said to Shirley.

She nodded, and he went into his den for his instruments, lying ready on a tray. Ada intercepted him as he came out with them.

"What are you going to do?"

"Operate."

"You shall not!" She caught at his hand.

"Take care! They've been sterilized. You will get cut!"

"I don't care! David, you shall not! He is my child! I will not have him tortured!"

"Hush!" he said, sternly. "Control yourself for the child, if you cannot for me. He will die without it."

"He will die if you touch him!"

"Shirley!" called David, hoarsely. Shirley came out.

"Ada, trust him! He knows best. We all trust him." She laid a hand upon the girl's quivering arm; but Ada's diseased instinct for situations made her seize this critical moment to wound the other woman by such a speech as she would have made had she been the stage heroine of a fictitious drama.

"Take your hand off from my arm," she said, with deliberate emphasis. "Do you think I will bear interference between me and my husband from you, of all people?"

Shirley recoiled. She could not even pretend not to understand. Instinctively she threw her head back, while the indignant color flashed into her face; but it faded on the instant. Was this a moment to dwell upon insults? Bertie — Bertie!

"I will go," she said, looking toward David to see what he would bid her do; but no word came from his white lips. He answered her look by one of stark misery. The heart in him was like water. By an effort terrible to witness he pulled himself together, entered the bedroom, and turned the key.

Ada glided to the door, and tried it.

"He has locked me out! Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" she gasped, and forgetting the insulting words she had just spoken, in the instinctive

clutch of her undisciplined mind at some one, any one to throw the brunt of the situation upon, she turned to the spot where Shirley had been standing; but there was no one there.

Shirley had hurried down-stairs. Seeing people in the street, she turned in the opposite direction, toward a flight of steps leading down to a road which ran between high banks to the railroad track. At the foot of the steps she ran into some one who had just started to come up.

"Miss DeForest! You are crying! What is the matter?" inquired an anxious voice.

It was Gordon Dale.

CHAPTER TWENTY - SEVEN

SHIRLEY faced him in helpless distress, without trying to hide her tears. They ran down her cheeks; she fumbled in vain for her handkerchief. Dale took out his own, and dried her eyes.

"Tell me what the matter is," he repeated, moving to screen her from a passing team. He had never seen her lose her self-control before.

"I can't — talk," she answered piteously, like a child. If only he would not be so kind; if only his voice would not be so tender!

"Let us go up there on the bank," he proposed, after a minute's silence, and offered his hand to help her up the ascent. His warm touch gave her another pang. "I have nothing of my own; my friends all belong to other people," thought poor Shirley, in her hour of humiliation. She felt so bruised, so empty!

A long tract of waste ground stretched beside the railroad track. The air quivered above the hot rails. Fritillary butterflies fluttered like dazzling blots in the sunshine. An old apple-tree in the distance afforded some shade, and here Dale halted. Only by turning his head did he perceive that she was still crying, without sound or any distortion of her features. The habit of self-restraint lingered. It struck him how many times she must have wept — in the night, with the door open into the next room — to have learned to cry like

that. At the thought he clenched his hand around a branch of the tree.

"How much can you tell me?" he asked.

She was grateful for that way of putting the question, which made it easier for her to reply. The news shocked him.

"I knew nothing about it. Do you think I could be of any use if I called there now? I have a horror of forcing myself on people at the wrong time because I am a minister."

"I do not know whether a man could do anything or not. They have no nurse, of course, and Mrs. Kent —" she choked — "is worn out with fright."

He wondered very much that she should be here, and not there, but made no comment.

"How could he bear it if that little boy were to be taken from him?"

"He will never get over it, even if Bertie lives," she cried, passionately. "He was all alone in the world at that awful moment. Oh, David, my dear! Oh, David, my dear!" Her hands went up to her face.

Dale clutched at the branch so hard that he tore the leaves.

"Don't! I cannot bear to see you cry," he said, almost roughly. "Let me take you home. It is too hot for you to be here any longer. If you will wait a few minutes I will come back with an umbrella."

This was real devotion, and Shirley would not have been a woman if she had not liked it.

"Oh, no, thank you; I can get home perfectly well. I will keep in the shade."

When they reached the flight of steps again she was about to bid him good-bye, and go on by the road.

"Miss DeForest?"

She turned.

"May I come to see you some evening next week? I — there is something I want to ask you."

Ah, he had got over his scruples. It was only a question of time.

"Certainly."

"When?" He was evidently a little embarrassed.

"Any time."

He hesitated a moment as if he had more to say, and then raised his hat. With a red mark on his forehead, and the dust of the road on his shoes, he was not a picturesque object, but she was not thinking of that. She was thinking that there was no end to the burden of other people's confidences. It was a self-imposed burden; she had no right to complain; only, she was tired. It is the strong, not the weak, who weary of drawing from their own cisterns, and long for a cup of cold water at the hands of a friend.

Meanwhile, Ada Kent was kneeling by the hall divan, with her head buried in the cushions. "What shall I do? What shall I do?" she moaned, shaking all over in the tumult of her feelings — dread, despair, the rebellion of an overruled will. Bertie was her child! If he died she would never forgive David, never! She clinched her hands, she bit her lips in her dumb frenzy. Then she remembered that Bertie might hear her smothered gasps, and tried to check them. After a long time she raised her head, and listened. No sounds came from the other side of the door. The silence was terrible. She dared not call or knock. Stealthily she crept to the door, and crouched beside it, her ear to the

wall; a forlorn little bunch in blue, the product of her generation, a woman brought up without law.

At last she heard a step inside, and struggled to her knees. The door opened, and her husband came out.

"Is he dead, David? David! is he dead?" she cried in a thrilling whisper, clutching at his knees. But Dr. Kent, swaying as he walked, groped his way to the couch, and fainted.

He lay there, a few days later, exhausted in spirit. The operation, performed under such heart-breaking circumstances, had been successful. Bertie would live, and his wife believed in him now. If the child had died —

Ada watched his every movement with the anxiety of a pet cat which misses its usual fondling, and only waits an invitation to spring upon one's knee.

"Don't you want me to make you some lemonade, David?"

"No, thank you."

"Or an egg-nog? You ought to have something." She knelt beside the couch to smooth his hair. He accepted the caress; indeed, he was grateful for it. He felt beaten, broken, somehow.

Ada nestled closer to him.

"David, I am very sorry that I spoke to Miss Shirley that day as I did. I did not know what I was saying. You always speak as if she were perfect, and I was wild with grief, and — Of course you don't care more for her than you do for me — of course you don't."

He made no reply. He was too proud to assert his integrity by a word.

"I know you don't care for her; I know you don't," Ada repeated, with rising sobs. "It was very silly of

me, when she is so old and faded; of course no one could think of her in that way. . . . David, won't you speak to me? Say you love me! What shall I do? Do you want me to tell her I was worn out, and did not know what I was saying?"

"No. We cannot insult Shirley DeForest by reminding her of that moment. We can only trust her goodness to forgive it without being asked."

"How hard you are to me!" she cried. "You have no imagination, or you would understand what agonies I have been through! You locked me out of my own child's room! It was ages before you came out. . . . I thought I should go mad. Oh, I have suffered so! I have suffered so!"

This, then, was what he had bound himself to; this was the future he had made for himself. Always to be alone; never to ease the burdens on his soul by the prop of a frailer shoulder; to live in this close intimacy without companionship, and never tell his thirst. And the one who had muddied that little rill of an old-time friendship was no enemy, but — his wife!

Say that the rill ought not to have been there? As well say that a man's heart shall have no springs.

David Kent bowed to his fate. Some sweetness oozed out of his bruised nature, and turning, he laid his hand on his wife's head.

"Poor girl!" he said; "poor girl!"

.

That same week Shirley DeForest, too poor to buy any summer gowns, turned over the stores in her attic in search of something thin to wear. She chanced upon

forgotten treasures; old ball gowns, dance cards, German favors, hatbands from various ships, a timetable in French, with stray leaves of Baedeker. Once she would have winced at these reminders of a care-free girlhood, but she was healthier now than she had been a few years ago, and although they gave her mingled feelings, she smiled at the sight of them. At last, in the tray of a trunk, on top of an old white lawn dress, she found a dozen pairs of Don's white cotton gloves, which he had given her to mend where they had "fetched away."

That brought tears. She caught up the most hole-y pair, and kissed them. Oh, it was good not to be so numb inside any more! Don, dear old boy! So little left of his affluent manhood; three or four uniforms packed away with moth balls, the sword down-stairs, a photograph or two — was that all?

No, never. Somewhere or other, what their family life had stood for was going on. She dropped the gloves in her own bureau drawer. She could bear the sight of them now. For the richest relic of the past is the heart itself, with its deepened capacity, its undying memory.

She brought the white lawn down-stairs, and examined it. It was a quaint dress with shirred flounce, and a fichu edged with fine lace, which Don in his lordly fashion had approved. She had thrown it aside in her extravagant days because of a tear in the skirt. Now she sat alone in the house and mended it, and put her finest needlework into the darn, as if by doing so she were somehow showing a tender humor toward that other Shirley, who had no one now to be patient with her but herself.

When she had donned the dress, its airiness made her conscious of herself, and she threw a black lace scarf over it as she went out to the porch. The twilights were breathless. The trees, clothed in the deep green of summer, stretched across the house front as if to shut her in.

Some one hurried up the steps from the bridge, walking with nervous jerks of the shoulders. She held her light muslin tightly around her; its frills swished about her feet.

"Why, Shirley, you are in white!" she panted, out of breath. "Is that dress new? There is something just like it in the latest 'Modes.'"

"Just pure luck," answered Shirley. "I am thankful not to look antediluvian beside your new organdy. It is very becoming."

"What does it matter how I look?" asked Lizzie Pons, in a repressed, savage tone, leaning her head against a pillar. "I hoped I should find you here. I had to get away; I could not stand it any longer."

Shirley only looked an answer. She knew that what Lizzie wanted of her was to listen, not to talk.

"It is the same old round, day after day; housework, nursing; nursing, housework. Every one takes it for granted that that is what I am alive for, to keep house for Father. No one ever tells me that I work too hard. If there were only two of us! But when Milly comes home with the children it only makes more work for me. Did you know that Norma Hitchcock was going abroad? Staffa, Iona, Scotland, and the cathedral towns."

"She is not half so well prepared for that trip as you."

"Much good that does me!" said Lizzie. The muscles around her mouth were tense; she talked with grimaces. "What earthly use is it for me to have any aspirations? I should be better off without them. I never shall go anywhere. Father makes fun of my maps and books. He asks me if I have made up my mind where I am going junketing after he is dead and gone. The things he says! Sometimes I feel as if I were in some dreadful nightmare. Things have got over happening to me. I am just a machine; I exist."

Shirley's answer was a singular one. She touched the wrist that lay in her lap.

"You have kept your pretty arm," she said, admiringly. "You ought to wear those elbow sleeves all the time."

Lizzie blushed. Her forearm was, in fact, remarkably pretty.

"I believe you are the only person who cares whether my arm is pretty or not," she said, in a softened tone.

"Ask them, and see!"

"Shirley DeForest! As if I would do such a thing!"

"Well, beauty is beauty," Shirley persisted. "We may not possess the whole of it, but we can enjoy what we have, and be thankful that there is something attractive about us."

"Oh, you, yes." Lizzie lowered her voice.

"If Father would only act satisfied with me! If he would say a word sometimes to show that he likes me as well as Milly! She can do whatever she likes, and it is all right; but he finds fault with me from morning to night. He watches me all the time . . . and I am not strong, Shirley. I don't sleep soundly any more; I am afraid he will call me in the night—

you know . . . ” Shirley nodded. “ Father does not understand. He sharpens his claws on me.”

“ Give him something more to sharpen them on,” said Shirley, unexpectedly. “ You are a good, patient daughter, Lizzie, but you are too, well, meek!”

“ I try to bear what I have to bear,” replied Lizzie, primly. “ Father does not like anything I do. He asked me yesterday if I could not get over looking so confoundedly resigned.”

Shirley laughed provokingly. The laugh showed her beautifully arched teeth, and made a little wrinkle across her delicately aquiline nose.

“ There are some advantages in growing older! One can get inside of a man’s mind. See, Lizzie, your father has been an active man, prominent in the village. He has outlived his neighbors, and the younger men go on without him; and he resents being treated like an old foggy when his mind is as bright as ever. He wants companionship. He says sharp things to you because he is restless and hungry. Do not take it so seriously; toss it right back; he likes repartee. Be a playmate to him; make him laugh; say something funny.”

“ I can’t talk funny when I don’t feel funny,” said Lizzie.

“ Can’t you? It is one of the easiest things in the world.”

“ How the water gurgles under the bridge to-night!” said Lizzie, after a pause. “ Shirley, do you ever wish you could be twenty again?”

Shirley was silent a minute. It was not to such as Lizzie that she could unveil her nature, but, dared she be anything but true with this other woman, whose life was starving within her for want of joy?

"Sometimes I wish that I could feel young, and live in the future as I did then, but I would not dare to go back! I should be afraid. Why, Lizzie, you and I are only a little over thirty. The thirties ought to be one's best and fullest years."

"They're not," said Lizzie. She got up.

"Now I must go home and help Father to bed. It always does me good to come here. I should think you would be tired of me by this time."

For answer, Shirley gave her hand a grip, and they went down the steps from terrace to terrace until they had reached the lowest level but one. Here she stopped.

"Do you remember," she said, "how I broke down the day when Elga left without warning because she was afraid of Mamma, and how you came over every day to help me take care of the furnace in all that bitter cold? Good-night, dear. Take heart."

"Ah, why cannot we all live bigger lives?" she thought, as she returned to her post in the doorway. Somewhere in the distance an untrained voice was singing Schubert's Serenade. Inarticulate, wordless, the sounds went out into the night. Ah, to be twenty again? Or to take what the years had brought, and to say, that which I have had, and dreamed, and suffered, is my own?

A step sounded on the bridge, a quick, decided step. She knew it; it was Dale's. He had not lost any time, she reflected. More confidences. Did she smile, or sigh? Why did he want to come to her with his love affairs? How would he speak of Ruth? She wondered.

CHAPTER TWENTY - EIGHT

DALE started as she rose to her feet in the dusk.
“Miss DeForest! I did not know you were there,” he said.

“I was just about to go in,” she answered. She had discovered from that instant’s contact with his hand that he was in a highly nervous state, and she placed herself so that the chair nearest hers would be a trifle in shadow, if he chose to take advantage of that. She had managed these interviews before. Dale did choose. He stole a glance at her as she seated herself in the Chippendale chair, for Miss DeForest, in her quaint white gown, with its lace trimmings yellowed to the tint of old ivory, was a very pleasing object. Again the photograph came before his eyes, but this time there was no blur.

“You were kind to let me come,” he began, abruptly.

“I am always glad to see you. You had something to talk over with me, I think you said?” She felt that a frank approach might set him at ease.

“Yes.” He did not seem to find it easy to begin. She smiled encouragingly, and waited. He flushed.

“Miss DeForest, can you sympathize with a family life totally unlike your own?”

This was a different opening move from what she had expected.

“I would try.”

"You may have heard, perhaps, that some time ago there was a woman — a woman called upon me here, and remained an hour or so in my study. The village people have been disposed to make capital out of the incident."

"Not to me," she answered.

"Some persons went so far as to insinuate that I was secretly married, or that I had something disgraceful in my past."

"That," said Miss DeForest, calmly, "is all great nonsense."

The color rushed into his face.

"Why do you think so?"

"It is not in your atmosphere. You are living a truthful life."

He did not reply at once, but his face worked. When at length he returned her look quietly there was resolution not unmixed with sadness in his mien.

"Thank you," he said. "There are two who trust me, then; you, and Mrs. Lemmon. She came to ask me about the gossip. I was glad that she did; but you have believed in me without asking. I thought I knew before I came here how much these petty matters become every one's concern in a small place like this, but I never dreamed that a man's reputation for common honesty could be assailed for such inadequate cause. It hurt me cruelly. If I cannot convince others of my sincerity by what I am, how shall I hope to do so by what I say? Is it that any of my people would be glad to discover a blot on my character?"

"No, no, you misunderstand; it is only underbred curiosity," she replied, quickly. "You have been

reticent from the first about your family connections, and they do not comprehend intercourse on such terms. They wish to think that they know all about you. It irritates them for you to maintain any reserve. It is just as if they could not feel at home in another's house unless they had liberty to rummage in all the bureau drawers."

"I like your word 'rummage,'" said Dale, with bitter emphasis. In some surprise, too, for he had never heard her criticize her environment so sharply before. "I acknowledge their right to question my conduct, but none to pry into my family history. There is a painful story in my life. I came to tell it to you, if — but perhaps you do not care to hear it?"

"Yes, please. Tell me whatever you will."

"The woman who called upon me that day —"

"Well?"

"She is my father's second wife."

"Your stepmother?"

"I have never acknowledged her by that name, nor will I ever do so," said Dale, sternly. "My father made many business trips away from home. On one of them he must have met her, and become infatuated with her. He married her and brought her home, without telling me beforehand of his intention. Whether he was acquainted with her during my mother's lifetime or not I do not know. I do not even know where she came from. All I know is that she is not a good woman. At one time or another she has been at odds with life."

"I was a young fellow at the time, just entering college, and I resented the slight to my mother's memory. She had been dead but six months. I asked

my father who the woman was, and where she had come from.

" 'It is no one's business where she came from,' he replied. 'She is my wife, and that is enough.'

"Very soon after her entrance into our home he deeded some property to her which had belonged to my mother. She fully intended it to come to me when I was twenty-one, but she had left it in his hands. The injustice of it rankles yet; but that was far from being the worst. The worst was the growing change in my father. Mrs. Dale brought out a side of his nature which I had never realized that he possessed. She had a good-humored way, clever and agreeable, and she played upon all his weaknesses. She had much more power over him than my mother had ever had. It was not long before he was completely under her influence. The sight of it became intolerable to me. All the time that I was in college I never asked a friend to my home, and I refused other men's hospitality because I was not able to return it. I lost more in my relations with men than can ever be made up to me. I owe that to Mrs. Dale.

"When I came home for my vacations I used to find our habits of living changed, and my father growing more and more unlike himself. Mrs. Dale encouraged him to throw off moral restraints. She seemed to do so with special intention, when I was at home, in order to wound me. Although she was a woman of refined habits, never slipshod, always composed and well dressed, there was something in her personality which smacked not of the lady. She never seemed to object to things which a lady born and bred would have shrunk from. I think she liked to see him growing

coarser — oh, how can I speak of it? It is hideous! Sometimes I think that I am not a gentleman.”

“You are,” said Shirley, quietly.

He drew a long breath.

“Finally the break came when I was on the point of entering the Theological Seminary. My father knew perfectly well that I had chosen my profession long before, but he acted as if my decision had taken him by surprise. He was very angry. He asked me if I had not brains enough to do a man’s work in the world, instead of preaching to women and hypocrites. He said — no, I will not repeat what he said, even to you. I had heard him speak in that tone before, but not of me. I lost my temper, we quarreled, and I left home.

“Because I had to make my own way, it took me two years longer to get through my seminary course. That did me no harm, although it was my first experience of poverty, but it was very bitter to me to realize that I had no home. I learned to hold my tongue. If I am reserved, there is cause for it.

“When I was in my Senior year I came to feel that I had been more to blame than my father for the quarrel. I reproached myself for letting Mrs. Dale succeed in estranging us from each other. It worked upon me. At last, one night — I had been roaming the streets on the Hill, seeing lights in other people’s windows — I wrote to him that I was coming home for a few days to see him. He did not answer my letter, and I took that for consent, and went home.

“I found him greatly altered; in looks, as well as in manner. He had grown stout, and puffy under the eyes. His voice was very loud. He treated me in a

way that was half contemptuous, and half — I do not know what. Sitting across the room, watching us both in the same old way, with the same little smile playing around her mouth, her forehead smooth, her chestnut hair like satin, was Mrs. Dale; not a day older.

“She is a strange woman, a woman of no ordinary ability. She excites one’s imagination; she makes one think of things one has read. Servants are afraid to disobey her, and yet she is good-natured with them. Clerks will leave other customers to wait upon her. Even those who do not like her, like me, are affected by her presence. She has great self-control. Most people drop allusions to their past; I have never known her to let fall a syllable about her own past. Her perceptions are very keen, especially for the weak spots in men and women. I once heard her predict a certain man’s downfall in business, and the prediction came true. He was a defaulter, and she read it in his face. In what school did she acquire her knowledge of evil? It is a costly knowledge — one pays! She has paid, I am sure of that.

“Sometimes I wonder what keeps her there in that house, a woman still young. It is not principle; she has no principle. It is not love. If she had ever loved my father I could understand it, but she does not love him; she never cared for him. She even speaks disrespectfully of him to me, she is so sure of her power. Me she hates, and yet I sometimes think that she would be willing to be a friend to me after her fashion, if she could only take the heart out of me, if she could make me see life as she sees it. She has tried. She tried from the first. I resisted her openly when I was a boy. I felt so strong then! I am not so sure of myself now.

I did not know then how terribly subtle evil is, how it forces itself upon you and influences you, whether you yield or whether you resist — ”

Shirley interrupted him.

“ Mr. Dale, I cannot believe that any one could have such a perverted nature as you describe.”

“ Pardon me; you do not know what evil is,” he replied. “ You have seen sin; you have heard of crimes; you have come in contact with the feeble and the selfish, who see the right but do it not; but the spirit that calls good evil, to whom any goodness is a reproach, that watches deterioration with interest, and desires to make others like itself, — that never yet beat a path to your door! The bravest are not brave before that spirit. The strongest are not strong. Goodness seems less good, purity less pure. There are times when one grows tired of contending, almost ready to relax, and let it do its will, only to end the strife. I question myself and the universe every time I go home. And it is in that atmosphere that my father lives! If I could only put the clock back! If I could only be more to him now! I cannot give it up. He is my father, and I am his son. Miss DeForest, do you think a man is justified in asking a woman to marry him, with such conditions in the background of his life? ”

She thought a moment before replying. A quick vision came to her of the gay girl whom she had held back by main force on that wild night. She chose her words with care.

“ I think that, if a woman loved you enough to marry you, all those other things would be secondary.”

"Would she — do you think she would be w
accept those secondary things, as you call them

"If she loved you, she would."

There was a short pause. Dale did not lool

"Would . . . you?"

CHAPTER TWENTY - NINE

THE room was very still. It seemed to Shirley as if time itself had stopped. She did not look up at the first instant, and after that it was impossible. Her eyes were fixed upon the meshes of black lace over her knee until the threads were magnified, and swam in dark mist.

"Would you?" he repeated.

"You surely are not in earnest?" she asked, very gently.

"I am in dead earnest."

"I am older than you." She strove for a maternal tone, but it was not exactly a success. Her voice fluttered, and her hands were cold.

"Not so much as you think. It is not a question of time. You began life two years before me, but which of us has lived longer? I am older than you in most ways."

He waited, a hand on either knee, for her to go on. This inertia, suggesting she knew not what reserve power behind it, was singularly disturbing. Already she was losing command of the situation; it was not what she was used to!

"It is so — ridiculous!" she exclaimed, nervously.

"I would use another word," said Dale.

"It is only what others would say."

"Their opinion will not be asked. I can attend to my own love affair."

The word made her tingle again. It was true, then? She had not misunderstood. Many women, as used to love as she, need reassurance on that score. Novels to the contrary, what they say at such moments does not bear reporting well.

"Every one would call it madness in you," she faltered.

"Miss DeForest," said Dale, with determination, "am I a man to you, or am I only a minister?"

"You are both, but —"

"A man of like passions to other men, knowing his own desires? A man who means to take his own course, live his own life, follow his own heart? Look at me, and tell me what you think. Forget the minister; speak to the man!"

So challenged, she did look up, and met his eyes, dilated by strong feeling, in a gaze which lasted many heart-beats. He did not stir. He seemed to be offering his whole soul for inspection. She was not yet won, but she was strangely thrilled.

"I love you," he said, and his voice sank to a deeper pitch.

"With my grey hair?" asked Shirley, with a proud little smile of self-depreciation.

"Yes. Your grey hair, and your cherry-blossom face."

The "cherry-blossom" face became of a warmer whiteness, and then — Dale held his breath. Some forgotten words of Granny Akers' flashed into his mind: "They say at sunset sometimes it's like wild roses lying on 'em. Did you ever see it?"

"I thought it was Ruth," she murmured.

"Did you?" He drew a long breath. "I don't think much of your insight! Why, I talk to you in my own mind all the time; I think to you! Do you remember the Sunday when you were not at church? I do not know how I ever got through my sermon; it seemed to me that every one must have found me out; but that you, with your intuitions, should not have found me out —"

"Of course I knew that you were in love with some one."

"Oh!"

He leaned forward, his chin in his hand.

"I do not believe that you ever think of yourself at all."

"You are quite wrong."

"It was that lack of self-consciousness in you which fascinated me from the first. You were a problem to me, and I made up my mind to solve it. I asked myself whether a woman's nature were totally different from a man's; whether it was enough for you to be living for other people, giving out right and left and asking nothing in return, or whether you had been through so much that you had got over caring. I want to make you care! I want to shake you out of your grooves! You provoke me with that way you have, as if you had got beyond it all. Have you ever loved any one . . . enough?"

"That is a bold question." It was a new thing to Shirley DeForest to be talked to in this manner.

"It is, yes. Is it too bold? I need to know. I need to have you honest with me; I count on it. I cannot believe that you have ever known a great love;

you would not be so young! In all else you are perfect; no one can teach you. In this one thing you are a child still. Shirley, tell me! I told you about myself. Do you know what it cost me? Let it be truth between you and me, whether you care for me or not. Is it anything like the truth, what I have guessed?"

"Yes," she replied, simply, for there was no other answer possible.

"Thank you," he said, and covered his face with his hands for a moment. He was trembling.

"So you give yourself out in fragments?" he continued. "You love them all as much as you can. You even love me a little." His eyes glittered with sudden tears. "But—I want more! It is not enough for me to share with the rest. What has a woman like you to do, stranded in this village? You belong to the world, and you know it. I should like to give you everything. I can only give you myself. And it is not a smooth life, seen from the inside. I have dark moods. The worst thing you can do for yourself if you want to be understood is to give way to your sense of humor. Your feelings are always being discounted, misinterpreted. But I could come to you, Shirley, I could come to you with everything. It wouldn't bore you, would it?"

Bore her?

He leaned across her chair, his hands on the arms of it, his face all glowing in the lamplight. To the frail woman, startled out of her twilight life, his presence was overpowering. She shrank back instinctively, not knowing what she said.

"Don't, please!"

He drew back at once, too hurt for speech. His eyes sought the floor. The pattern of the carpet

stamped itself upon his retina as trivial things will at such a moment; his mind was a blank. But Shirley, recovering herself, had put out her hand.

"I am very sorry — I did not mean —"

With as much tenderness as if he had understood the nun-like impulse whose springs were hidden from him, he took it, held it to his cheek a moment, and laid it back in her lap gently.

And then it was that Shirley began to want him.

She summoned her candor.

"Mr. Dale, I am greatly touched by what you have said. It is not a thing one can put in words! But you ought to marry another woman, not me. Don't you see that you overstate your own feelings? You think that you are in love with me because we have been friends. You have not had so very many friends among women, perhaps? Friendship is my specialty, if I have any!" Her face lit up with a quaint humor, half pathetic. "It is fatally easy to mistake those feelings for love, and the woman who allows it to be so from — from weakness is spoiling a man's life."

He smiled.

"It is easy to mistake friendship for love, but when the miracle happens we do not mistake it for friendship. Do you remember the story of the fisherman who let the genie out of the box, and at once it filled a hundred times the space? Do you think that you or any other woman can put that genie back into the box again? It is beyond your power!"

"But," Shirley objected, "I have had men — take a fancy to me before. They got over it!"

"Did they?" he asked, with a quizzical pucker of

his mouth, as when one smiles at a child, "did they? That is all the better, isn't it? For they are out of the fugue now, but I am in; and I am in to stay. And it is not a fancy."

He rose.

"Well, I never expected that you would have me the first time of asking, but for the twenty-first I am not without hope."

"You will not ask me twenty-one times," said Shirley, playfully. Curiously enough, she felt more at ease on her feet. She even thought that she could put the genie back into the box, and be again the grey-haired, old-young Miss DeForest of her own inward vision.

"If twenty times is not sufficient," he answered, glancing up from the note-book he had taken from an inner pocket. "Hm — to-morrow, Thursday evening meeting; Friday, the Boys' Club; Saturday, Deacon Branch wants to see me about something — I can't break him of coming to the parsonage Saturday; I've taken to the woods behind me, but there are mosquitoes; Monday, the business committee — that last thunder-shower did some damage to the spire; Tuesday. On Tuesday we will renew this conversation."

"But it will never do for you to be coming here so often!" she remonstrated.

"I shall come before breakfast," he persisted.

Shirley stood still in the middle of the room, and laughed. The interview was like nothing she had ever experienced. It was impossible not to enjoy the little man. His shoulders shook, he ducked his head. He looked like the good boy caught in mischief.

"Don't you think you had better say 'yes' now, and save all this bother?"

The little devil that lurks in every woman leaped to the surface.

"If you think it bother, that is a sufficient reason against it!"

"For you, I mean," he answered, with a suppressed sparkle.

This checked her, for she could not say that it was a bother, when in her secret heart she was proud that he had not let himself be repulsed. Perhaps he guessed as much, for he was wise enough to go.

"Good night," he said, softly, shutting the screen door. He looked like some dark, soft-eyed night creature out there in the dusk. Shirley fled.

As she set her candle down upon her dressing-table, she gave a startled look at her face in the mirror. Great, lustrous blue eyes shone back at her just as they had shone back from the same glass when she was twenty. Where had the years gone? In those days she had powdered her thick hair from vanity, and they had called her "The Marquise." There was no need of powder now, and the Marquise was there still, but — "cherry-blossom!" She blushed, and saw that she had blushed.

"Why, I will not be so foolish!" she thought, sternly, turning away from the fascinating reflection. "I am not in love. . . . The sweetness of him, to think of such a thing! It would never do in the world. I shall be a little old lady in a few years, and then he would regret it. Yes, indeed, it is well for him that I am not in love with him."

And after she had crept into bed, and lay awake

with one slender hand under her cheek, because it was the one his cheek had touched, she still murmured to herself in drowsy conflict:

“I’m not in love . . . I’m not . . . I’m not!”

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE genie was out of the box at last! Dale's heart was lighter in consequence. How he had struggled with himself, knowing her pride, that most impervious pride which is too sure of its position to be arrogant, before he could bring himself to tell her his story. Perhaps he had been a little morbid about his home. What was it she had said? "Secondary things." Perhaps he had overrated the extent of a hard woman's influence. Then he thought of his father's coarse laugh, his overbearing ways, his openly expressed contempt for disinterestedness, — his father, who had once been his strong man, his *Kwasind*. Gordon Dale was very human. The loss of tone in his father's home hurt his pride, as well as his moral sense.

He had failed as a son. Shirley, in his place, would not have failed. Had she not carried those two stricken beings on her frail young shoulders? Only let him win her, let his father but admit her presence, and it would be her ascendancy that Linda would have to reckon with!

Absorbed in these sweet and bitter thoughts, he hardly heeded the story brought him by one of the men at work on the church, until a word arrested his attention.

"Is Steeple Jack up there now?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir, that's just what I was trying to tell you."

The rope has caught, and he can't get either up or down. They have gone for another rope, but no one knows how to get it up to him."

"Why am I not a man who can *do* things?" thought Dale, hastening to the spot. A small crowd had gathered on the Green. Heads looked out of the highest church windows, all turned upward toward a point some feet below the apex of the spire, where a man's figure dangled. It looked small and dark against the sky. The rope had caught upon a projection, and Steeple Jack was making a desperate effort to extricate himself from his perilous position.

"We must get a second rope up to him," said Dale.

"Easier said than done," said a workman, civilly.

"Where one man has gone another can go."

"Not unless he knows how. Steeple Jack never tells his method to any one else."

The figure above made a sudden lurch outward, and spun around helplessly. The rope was beginning to fray. A murmur ran through the crowd.

"I cannot stand that," Dale exclaimed. Throwing off his coat, he rushed into the church.

"You can't do it from above, Mr. Dale. The nearest point is fifty feet below him. Now, then, what do you boys want? You keep out!"

"I want to speak to Mr. Dale," said Billy Lemmon, hot at the rebuff.

"Well, you can't. There'd be a swarm of 'em in here, if I let 'em all in; no, you wait till he comes down —" but Billy had dodged under his arm, and, clattering up-stairs, plucked at the minister's shirt-sleeve. He whispered in his ear.

"What? Why, most certainly. Go, fetch it, and be as quick as you can!"

"You bet," said Billy, and ran off. Dale followed more slowly.

"I thought the parson would have to give it up," said one, but Dale turned around good-naturedly.

"I am waiting for an ally worth two of me," said he.

Steeple Jack was losing his nerve. He had climbed many spires, but he had never been in such a tight place before. The cold sweat broke out on his forehead. He felt ten times more lonely for the crowd buzzing down there below him. No help from them. At which critical moment, a freckle-faced boy darted behind the spectators, and thrust a kite string into the minister's hand.

"Here it is. It was at Jim's," Billy panted.

"Fly it yourself," Dale ordered. Billy stood forth with his kite. A derisive laugh greeted him.

"It's that scatter-brained boy of Lemmon's," said one.

Billy heard, and his hand shook. It was like the nightmare of fever. Twice he essayed to fly the kite. The wind failed, and down it came.

"Better let me do it for you, Billy!" "Stand further back, you're on the wrong side." "Here, give it to me."

"Do not mind any of them," said Dale's voice in his ear. "This is your job. Do it in your own way. Remember that there are always two at such a time — the man who does the job, and the fellows who give advice."

"Ay — up!" answered Billy, with a gasp of excitement.

The third time failed. Steeple Jack turned his head. He saw, he understood. Some swift telegraphy passed between him and the boy's eager heart. He forgot the bystanders. That slender cord was will, was power. It must, it should reach. With steady hand he sent up the kite for the fourth time. It caught the upper current in the air, and soared up, up, like a live thing, nearer and nearer the spire. Oh, the beauty of it! Tears of pure delight stung Billy's eyes. Steeple Jack, waiting, watching, reached out cautiously with one arm —

"He's got it!" shouted the watchers below.

Dale hugged Billy in his excitement.

"Put on smaller cord first," he directed. The new rope was made fast, and Steeple Jack slowly hauled himself into safety.

Billy walked home on air. He dramatized the scene to come, — he himself in the center of the stage, his father and mother applauding. Maybe they would not call him "scatter-brained" after this! When he got home he found his father reading in the hammock, while Mrs. Lemmon sewed. At sight of them his elation collapsed like a pricked balloon, and he sank meekly into a chair.

"Anything going on down-town this afternoon?" asked Mr. Lemmon, presently.

"Yes, sir, there was an accident at the church," and Billy narrated the bare facts.

"That was clever," was Mr. Lemmon's approving comment. "Whose kite was it?"

"Oh, one of the fellows'," answered Billy, shuffling.

Mrs. Lemmon looked up from her buttonholes, but said nothing.

"It might have been yours, if you had had your wits about you," said his father. "I'd give a good deal to have you think quick like that. See if you can't do it, next time."

Billy loped disconsolately across the yard, a lump in his throat. Why must everything fall flat?

By and by a team drove past, and Mr. Lemmon strolled to the fence to exchange greetings.

"That is a pretty smart boy you have, Lemmon," said his neighbor. "I don't know what they would have done to save the fellow, if he had not happened to think of his kite."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Mrs. Lemmon, in triumph, flying across the yard. "William Gaylord Lemmon, shake hands this minute! How came you to think of it?"

"I was reading something about the Brooklyn Bridge, and it put it into my head," Billy admitted, blushing modestly.

"There! What a thing it is to have imagination. Nathan, aren't you proud of your boy?"

"I am. I am, certain," and Mr. Lemmon beamed all over. "But why didn't you tell Father just how it was, Billy?"

Billy looked at him candidly, but could not find words to explain.

"I couldn't," said he.

"Of course you couldn't," said his stepmother. "When the burden of proof is always upon us we object to playing the defendant."

"What does 'the burden of proof' mean, ma'am, if I may be allowed to inquire?"

"You may be allowed to look it up for yourself. Better do it now. Rule 19: The time to learn a thing is when you are eager to know."

"No, Henrietta, it is not rule 19," said Billy. "Rule 19 is: In shaking hands, remember that your hand is neither a fish's fin nor a lobster's claw."

"Well, if you have got the Compendium by heart, Billy —" said Mrs. Lemmon.

Myrtie Cole walked home through the midsummer twilight, a bag of flour on her arm. The August dusk was hateful to her, and so were the lurking shadows under a crescent moon. Doors and windows left open in the stifling heat meant that people could steal up and frighten you; they could come when they had been drinking.

Dale had bidden her come to church, and she had obeyed. No one had spoken to her there, but Ruth Gilmore had come to her cottage, and told her that she would take care of Joey Sunday mornings, and she had yielded unwillingly. She was jealous of Ruth, with her pretty face and beautiful dress, — this other girl who was one of the Good People, and did not have to try.

A dark mass standing beside a tree resolved itself into a man's figure, and slouched forward at her approach. He was a stocky youth, with his hat on one side of his head. He wore a blue shirt with soiled cuffs, and carried his coat over one arm.

"Hullo, Myrt!" he called in a rough voice. "Why, how touchy It is! Walks right past a fellow, and won't let us hear Its little voice."

"I hate the way you speak to me!" exclaimed Myrtie. She did not know how to repel his familiar

manner, and her very efforts to do so had created a sort of intimacy between them.

"We are growing very high and mighty all of a sudden. Good evening, Miss Cole!" He flourished his hat in a burlesque bow. "Does that suit your Majesty any better?"

"I don't want you to speak to me at all," she replied, quickening her pace to get rid of him. Her evident fear of him flattered his self-conceit. He worked the muscles of his arm in the darkness, with a complacent smirk. He did not want to hurt her; he only wanted a little fun.

"Say, Myrt, want a ticket to the Waukomis Fair? I've got one for you and Joey."

For a moment she was tempted. Why must she be the only one who never had any pleasure? It was not fair!

"I'll tell you what," he went on. "You come over, and I'll be around somewhere, and we will take in all the shows."

"No, I won't," said Myrtie, with too much emphasis. "I won't. You can't make me."

"Parson down on you for taking a little fun like the rest of 'em? He'd better mind his own business," said Tom Stickles, with an oath. He had had one encounter with the minister, and he did not care for another; hence he hated him.

"Don't you dare to say one word against him!" said Myrtie. "He is good . . . he is good."

"Good! That little white-livered chap —"

She struck him a stinging blow on the cheek with her free hand. It was so unexpected that the man recoiled.

"I'll make you pay for that, you cat!" he hissed.

Myrtie sprang inside the gate, and held it closed with all her force.

"Do!" she panted; "do! It would be just like you . . . coward . . . chasing after me because I've got nobody to take care of me. If you don't let me alone . . . if you try to come in — I'll kill you!"

She forgot the latch. It ripped open the paper bag, and showered her with flour. A small thing to decide her fate, but it was a week's provision for her and Joey. After Tom had gone away for the time, sullenly, she stole out, lamp in hand, crying bitterly, to scoop what she could save out of the dirt.

"Oh, I'm so tired! Oh, I'm so tired!" she sobbed.

In terror of Tom's return, she barricaded the house day and night. The strain told on her nerves. She slept badly. One night she woke up suddenly at a sound outside, and crept to the window. On the other side of the road she saw a shadow move stealthily. It might have been the shadow of a tree; she thought it was Tom's shadow. In desperation she resolved to run away.

Over in Ridgebury, seven miles away, were families that took summer boarders. They had trouble to get help. They would beat her down to the lowest price because of Joey, but she would try.

Next day she went to ask Miss Gilmore for the money she owed her for extra washing. Ruth was out of town. Two neat maids in black, with fresh caps and aprons, stood talking in a doorway. She thought they were talking about her.

Going home, she packed a few clothes and some food in a basket, locked the door, and hung the key around her neck. She could send it back by mail.

"I'm going to the p'itty lady's house; goody, goody!" shouted Joey, capering up and down in the road.

"No, we're not going to the pretty lady's house, either," answered Myrtie, crossly. Joey, wailing piteously, hung back with all the strength of his little arms, and she dragged him past the grounds. Joey was against her, too.

From the woods above the town she could see the upper story of the parsonage. She wished Mr. Dale knew why she was going. He was the only man who had thought her worth protecting, but she could not camp at his door. She might never see him again. Seven miles is as a hundred when you have no money. It was no use trying to be good, but she had tried to be decent. Myrtie put her hands up to her face.

"Mamma! I ti-ed," the child complained.

"Oh, Joey, you are not tired yet!" said poor Myrtie.

"I ti-ed. Take me, Mamma;" and she lifted him, and staggered on with her burden.

Her flight was so ill-planned that sunset found her but two miles and a half from the town. Down a side lane stood an abandoned house, its windows broken, its door sagging on its hinges. She stole around to the rear, to see if any one was there. She did not want any one to see her. Every one was an enemy.

"Whose house is this?" asked Joey.

"Nobody's," said Myrtie. "They have all gone away. See, how the floor has fallen in."

"*Poor* house," said Joey, pityingly, patting the door-sill. They cuddled up to each other, and went to sleep.

Not far from midnight, Myrtie was awakened by Joey's hands tugging at her dress.

"Mamma! light over dere."

A light flickered in the pasture beyond, intermittent like the light of a bonfire.

"Tum, Mamma," said the child, wriggling in her hold. He had a passion for fire.

"No, no, Joey," she answered quickly; "hush! It's bad people who are out at night. They must not know we are here."

But Joey had slipped out of her grasp, his eyes full of the dark like a cat's, and was running toward the bewitching light. Myrtie's voice died in her throat. She hastened after him blindly. Her heart cried out in dumb agony:

"It's no use. God! *God!*"

CHAPTER THIRTY - ONE

GRANNY AKERS had chosen her place well. It was a bowl-shaped hollow scooped out of the side of the pasture, lined with short grass and downy everlasting, and made deeper on one side by a large boulder fringed with huckleberry bushes. Curled up at the bottom of the dell one would be passed unseen at a few paces. As Granny Akers crouched on the turf, her black bonnet was lost in the night. She had kindled a fire of twigs and the dead catkins from a chestnut-tree. It burned discreetly, with little blaze between the feedings. It must have been burning some time to have raised that pile of gray ash around its central embers.

She was stripping the silk from two ears of corn, while in her lap lay a soft heap of whitish objects which gave out a curious, earthy scent. The chestnut's restless bulk loomed up at her right hand. It stood by itself in the pasture, and she knew every idiosyncrasy of its growth. The tree had borne dry nuts withering in their shells until she had adopted it.

"You can do better 'n this," she whispered, reaching up to pat the trunk; "you ain't old. I shall want some good nuts come October," and when October came, the tree responded by a bountiful crop.

It was dry and warm in the dell, but overhead there was a mysterious thrill in space, a creep and a

rustle of a wind rising with the moon. Soon she would steal up redly over the hill, hang on its edge for a brief moment, and then climb over the valley, a sight worth waiting for. Meanwhile, her corn began to brown with a smell of sweet burning, as if the very earth were giving out her juices. She turned the ears in her hands. There was a soft patter on the turf, a thud, thud along the ground. Were other hungry things abroad?

She looked up. Something round and bright was rising over the rock. It was not the moon. It was an apparition with dazzling red curls, and wide eyes fixed upon her in wonder and delight.

"Ole 'ady," said the apparition to itself, and clambering to the top of the boulder, stretched eager arms toward the fire.

"Ole 'ady," called Joey, conversationally, "hullo!"

"Mercy sakes! Where did you come from?" ejaculated Granny Akers, greatly startled. She shaded her eyes with her hand, the better to see the vivid little form which had sprung out of the darkness so suddenly.

"Over dere," Joey answered, waving his hand impartially in two or three directions. "Poor house, all to pieces. Joey and Mamma went to sleep."

"The poor house?" repeated Granny, bewildered. "Where is Mamma?"

"She's tummin'. Mamma? Tum on!" he shouted, and lost his balance. The old woman, springing like a cat, caught him as he fell. Myrtie, hurrying onward to overtake him, her heart beating like a drum in her morbid terror, heard his little voice calling fearlessly, and saw a dark form hovering in the tangle of huckleberry bushes. Of a sudden a great despair seized her.

Everything was against her, even Joey. The night had no mercy; nothing had mercy. She stumbled forward, her lips drawn back from her teeth in the horrid dread of a hunted creature for whom the fatal trap has yawned.

And then a little figure stepped out into the dusk, wearing an old hat trimmed with ragged chrysanthemums. "Who is it?" called Granny Akers' quavering voice.

"Oh, it's a woman!" screamed Myrtie, and, strength failing her, she pitched forward on hands and knees. She breathed in loud, short gasps; her head hung down like a dog's.

"Why, how you scared me!" the old woman exclaimed. "I guess you was scared too. Didn't expect to see old Granny Akers out here this time o' night, did you? There, now." As the girl sank face down into the grass, her arm over her head, incapable of further movement, she dragged her into the shelter of the fire. Her sun-burned hands had been handling aromatics all day, and they soothed.

"Just you lean back out of the wind; you ain't used to night air like me," she directed. "Why, it's that Cole girl."

"Yes'm."

"What you doing, way up here?"

"I — ran — away," Myrtie answered, her hand still at her throat.

"There, I expect you'll tell me by and by when you feel better." She picked up the mushrooms which had dropped from her lap, while Joey, who had looked on at this scene with a child's un-human curiosity, watched her.

"Is this your house?" he inquired.

"One of 'em," replied Granny Akers, twinkling.

Joey looked around him soberly.

"Where are the others?"

"Oh, all round. Wherever I want to be, that's my house."

"That's funny!" said Joey with a fat laugh, showing his black-edged little teeth.

"And now I'm going to give you some supper," declared Granny Akers. Thrusting a lean claw into the embers as a monkey might have done, she drew forth a roasted potato. She levied contributions on the farms along her itineraries of which she took strict account, coming to the door at another time with a handful of herbs or nuts. "I took a tomato off your vines one day when I was thirsty, and here's some gold thread to pay for it; it'll cure her sore mouth," she would say.

"It's hot, little feller," said she. "First you can warm your hands with it, and then I'll put some salt on it and you can eat it."

Joey took it in his chubby hands, and laid his red cheek against it. "Nice potato," he cooed.

"Now, you sit up and eat this corn while I toast my mushrooms," said Granny to Myrtie. The girl set her teeth hungrily into the corn, but shook her head at the mushrooms.

"I shouldn't dare eat those things; they're poison."

"Pretty healthy poison, judging by me," said the old woman, with one of her short laughs.

The moon was up at last, a gibbous moon whose light was strange and eerie. Shadows began to stir in the pasture. Here and there was a glisten as of

silver. Beyond, the chestnut-tree sighed. Joey, hugging the skin of his potato, had doubled up asleep on the sweet everlasting.

"He's all right there; it's as warm as toast," said Granny Akers. "Now, what made you run away?"

Myrtie reluctantly told her story.

"Don't pay any attention to 'em. Be a good girl, and they will let you alone."

The girl gave her a sidelong look which was bitter in its knowledge of evil.

"They don't want me to be good," she whispered. "Somebody's got to be bad, and they think it might as well be me as anybody."

"Eh? My goodness!" ejaculated the old woman, who had never in her life heard the brutal theorem stated, still less with such childish bluntness. "Well, it ain't going to be you," she affirmed. Her Puritan blood rose higher. "Don't you never let me hear you say such a thing again!"

"No, ma'am," said Myrtie, meekly.

"And where was you going, to be way up here on Chestnut Hill?"

"There's somebody in Ridgebury keeping boarders; her girl's left. I thought I'd try."

"Did you expect to tell her about him?" glancing at the sleeping Joey.

"Oh, everybody knows," said the girl, wearily. Her little face sagged from fatigue, and the lines around her mouth showed like crayon shadows, but there was a tragic beauty there for a close observer. Myrtie was finding her soul.

"Mr. Dale would be so disappointed," she murmured.

"Do you know Mr. Dale?"

"Yes'm. He's been the kindest of anybody. Once I didn't have anything in the house to eat but oatmeal, and Joey cried. He came and left some things on the door-step. I don't know how he found out. He thought I wouldn't know who brought them, but his name was on the inside of one of the papers. He told me I mustn't give up. He said I was — part of the kingdom of God. Do you believe it?"

Granny Akers looked up into the chestnut-tree, and meditated.

"I don't know what he means, but you'd better believe what he tells you to. What he believes don't hurt him."

She stamped out the fire carefully.

"I walked too far this afternoon, that was why I stopped to eat my supper. I was waiting for the moon to come up to light me home. Now we'll start. Two fields from here there's a marshy place on the other side of the fence, and you want to take care how you step."

At the fence she lifted Joey over, and the little boy half woke.

"Funny, wasn't it?" he said, drowsily.

Down the slope they went, leaving blurred tracks in the grass, and at each descent Myrtie's heart dropped lower. She would never find courage to run away again. The old woman — she was not sure of her name — had been kind, but she did not understand. She felt benumbed and dead.

It was midnight when they stood in the lane. The moon beat down upon the deserted house. The unpainted gray streaks showed their spidery outline.

Granny Akers unlocked the front door, and threw it open into the dark hall.

"You go right in and go to bed," she said.

"What, ma'am?" asked Myrtie.

"Go in. I'm going to see to you. Why, you're not sick, are you?" For Myrtie, still holding Joey, had sunk down on the stairs, and turned her face to the wall.

Zeph Branch and the Clark boys were going up the hill for apples, next morning. At least, that was what they thought they were going to do until, as they passed Granny Akers' house, winking at one another on the off side, the old woman herself darted out and convinced them to the contrary with such shakings of a letter which she held, such admonitions, such rappings and clawings of the shoulders nearest her hand, that they were thankful to get to the parsonage alive.

"Mr. Dale, Sir," the letter read, "Myrtie Cole is at my house. She started to run away because she was pestered. I name no names because I don't know none. She only got as far as Chestnut Hill. She's beat out. I want you to come straight up here to see her. She says you told her she belonged to the kingdom of God. She seems to set store by that. I want you to come right up here.

"Yours respectfully,

"MRS. JONATHAN AKERS."

"He's coming!" she announced, triumphantly, scurrying into the kitchen and out again. Myrtie got up from the lounge hastily, without a thought of her tumbled hair. As Dale entered, she faced him with a

new look of self-respect, and for the first time since he had known her, spoke first.

"Mr. Dale," she said, solemnly, "I tried!"

"May we all try as hard," answered Dale, much moved. "You have made a good fight, Myrtie. It is worth a great deal to the rest of us."

A lovely color flashed into her worn face. Beautiful as it was, it had cost too much for him to see it without pain.

"You're kind . . . you're kind to me—you and she! I can't stand it!"

Dale's eyes glittered, but his sense of humor insisted on relief. His mouth puckered affectionately.

"Why, yes, Myrtie, I think you can!"

Then she laughed too, and that eased the tension.

"She will get along with her washing, now she has no rent to pay; and my garden holds enough for us all," said Granny Akers. Joey stood at her elbow. He turned around from his occupation of making a very dingy pie crust cake.

"Funny, wasn't it?" he piped.

"He's said that twenty times," said Granny Akers.

"Yes, Joey, so it was."

"You will have him nipping at your skirts now, like William," suggested Dale, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh, William was the most selfish being I ever knew; he only cared for what he could get. I knew he would not stay long. Free to come, free to go; but there's some that aren't free, Mr. Dale. They can't take care of themselves. It is queer we don't make more allowance for it. If they was well provided for we shouldn't think strange that they didn't know how to take care of themselves; but if they are poor we expect

more of 'em than we do of rich folks; and if they are sick, we expect more of 'em than we do of well folks; and if they're weak by nature they've got to act considerable stronger than strong folks before we're willing to give 'em any credit for it."

"You are a rebuke to my faith," said Dale, strongly.

"Who, me?" said Granny Akers. "I haven't done anything. I don't know what you mean." Her voice dropped.

"Suppose it'd been Lucy?"

CHAPTER THIRTY - TWO

GRANNY AKERS found Myrtie a problem. The girl was affectionate, and perfectly docile, but she had no initiative. In whatever groove she found herself she would remain. For her sake and Joey's, the old woman took upon herself the yoke of a regular life, and it chafed her as it does a married man sometimes; he is happier as he is, but the old life was more fun!

She gave up her all-day rambles because she must be home at noon to get dinner for the three. She made knickerbockers for Joey out of an old skirt, and the smell of the cloth under the hot iron brought back disagreeable memories of her youth.

"I thought I'd got rid of all that, but 'twas just a play spell; it 'fades into the light of common day,' " she mused, while teaching Myrtie fine ironing.

"You mustn't be satisfied till you can do up a shirt-waist better than any one in the village, and then you want to charge according," she admonished her.

"They won't pay me the same as other people," said Myrtie, despondently.

"If you can do it better they will; they won't if it's only 'just about as good.' That's your responsibility, Myrtie Cole!"

Once, when the girl had been overreached, she went to Mrs. Sutherland and spoke her mind.

"You're a member of the church," said she. "I'm

not, but I've got idees of what they ought to be, — sort of standing by each other, an' not letting any one harm any one else."

"I'm sure, I wish her no harm," replied Mrs. Sutherland, twitching a little. "I gave her the work out of Christian kindness. I don't believe in coddling them up."

Granny Akers gave an exasperating cackle.

"Twenty-five cents more for a washing ain't coddling. Folks call Mr. Hitchcock a mean man, letting the mortgage be foreclosed on his brother's farm instead of helping him, but you don't expect him to take off a cent from every paper of pins you buy of him, on that account, do you?"

"The cases are not parallel," said Mrs. Sutherland with dignity.

"They p'int the same way; that's parallel enough. Myrtie Cole don't ask for 'Christian kindness,' she asks for fair play, and giving her seventy-five cents for a washing, and putting in a piqué skirt and a shirt rolled up in a pillow-case, as if it had got there by mistake, ain't fair play."

So, under this championship, Myrtie found a humble niche, but the old woman felt the change in her habits. For weeks she had not seen the reservoirs nor the waterfall; the Gorge knew her not; she had not had her August walk, knee-deep in goldenrod, to the Torch's peak. Human beings sometimes seem to lead abnormal lives, and yet flourish because they take up out of their environment the element which suits them as the clematis takes lime from the soil. When the soil is exhausted, its leaves turn yellow. Granny Akers felt withered. One day, coming home from a short

walk, she slipped on a stone she had crossed by a hundred times, and fell into the brook. Dr. Kent called her sickness gripe, but the real trouble went deeper.

"Look here, Myrtie, she is fretting herself away for outdoors, and you must bring it to her," he said.

"What shall I do?" asked Myrtie, helplessly.

"Just try to get some of it in here, — flowers or something," he suggested, and so she crowded short-stemmed asters into a red glass vase, the sight of which gave the patient such fidgets that she had to throw them away.

"Needn't pull that shade down, I want to see out," she ordered.

"I thought the light was bad for your eyes," said Myrtie, obeying. The old woman was as much a mystery to her as at first. Because two persons are bound together by mutual loyalty it does not follow that they will understand each other's mental processes. Granny Akers lost strength. Seeing this, Dr. Kent installed Miss Nelie Prindle. The swish of her skirts from her hips as she moved about the room was like the lash of a whip to the old woman's irritated senses.

"What you doing?" she called, summoning her with the umbrella standing for rapping purposes at the head of the bed, — an umbrella with a long beak, and one stick broken. "You're doing something out there; what is it?"

Nelie blushed and bridled.

"I was just cleaning out one of the secretary drawers."

"You mean you was just investigatin'. Well, you can stop. When I want those drawers cleaned out, I'll let you know."

"You never saw such a place in your life, Ma; it's confusion worse confounded," said Nelie at home,—for she flatly refused to stay in the same house as Myrtie over night, saying that it was not proper; "there's seeds in papers on the pantry shelves, and dried-up leaves in the drawer with the dish towels, and roots spread on the sitting-room floor on newspapers, with dirt under them, just plain dirt. And she has a red-covered book of poetry on the bed all the time. She says to me once: 'Cornely, if you was to read that Wordsworth all through, it wouldn't be nothing but Choctaw to you.' That just shows how crazy she is."

"How do you manage about the girl?" asked Mrs. Prindle, dropping her voice. "She doesn't interfere with you, does she?"

"She knows better than to interfere with me. I simply ignore her, of course. We have to eat together, but I read the Evangelist all through dinner so she won't speak to me. The boy is a perfect little terror!"

She did not explain that the reason why she thought so was that Joey had followed her up-stairs one day, in order to peep into the spare room where she was turning over the dresses in the closet. She was about to take one of them over to the window to examine it. Seeing her figure half hidden by the closet door, Joey stole up behind her noiselessly, his black eyes solemnly experimental, and shouted:

"Boo!"

Nelie jumped.

"You wicked little boy! Don't you never dare to do that again!" she cried, trembling with fright and wrath.

Joey retreated backward, lolling out his tongue. The

fixed gaze of his impish eyes was discomfiting. She credited it with all sorts of adult meanings.

A few days later, Granny Akers ordered her clothes laid out on a chair. Nelie objected.

"The doctor says you can't get up yet. I'm not going to have this room cluttered up any more than it is now."

She moved away from the bed with a swish of her skirts, and the next moment was jerked to a standstill. Granny had extended her umbrella with shaking hand, and running it through the starched bows of her lace-trimmed apron, had given it a twist. Nelie turned around, and grew fiery red. Reaching her neck out like a turkey, she swallowed.

"Cornely, am I alive or dead?" demanded Granny Akers.

"I — guess so!" faltered Cornely.

"You — guess — so?" repeated the old woman with withering emphasis. Then she laughed, and her laugh was more awful than her scorn. She looked like a blue-eyed mummy lying there. "Why, Cornely, that don't take much sense to answer! I s'pose you're afraid if you use up what little you've got you won't ever get any more. Now, you listen. When I'm dead you can do as you like, but as long as I'm alive I'm going to do as I'm a-mind to. You put my wrapper on that chair. And my bonnet. And my stockings."

"The doctor'll be in soon."

"It won't hurt him a mite to see those stockings. Now, I want you to make me some herb tea, every kind there is."

"I sha'n't let you have it to drink unless the doctor

says so," Nelie quavered, swallowing again. ("I have to be real firm, Ma," she said, afterward.)

"I don't want it to drink. You go make it."

After an interval Cornely appeared carrying six teacups on a tray. They gave out pungent odors. She ranged them with excessive care upon the bureau, pushing one of them, which was an inch out of line, into place. Then she turned around, and inquired pointedly, in a voice of acid sweetness:

"Is there anything else you'd like?"

"Yes," answered Granny Akers, a repressed gleam in her eyes. Nelie fell into the trap.

"What?"

"Just go, that's all."

Cornely went.

.

All through those days Shirley lived in a sweet unrest. The walls of her house were not solitary enough! She wandered over the hill behind her garden. It was haunted ground; everywhere she went she saw ghosts. One was a fair-faced little girl in a pink dress and white apron, the other, a boy half a head taller, with grave mouth and laughing eyes. He drops on one knee to wipe his sister's face with his dusty handkerchief.

"You always pitch right on your head," he complains. "Some day you'll break your nose, and then you'll be ugly. You want to throw your arms out when you fall, like me, look!" and down he goes, but jumps up with a wry face, rubbing his shoulder.

"Oh! You're hurt, Don!"

"I'm not, either. Don't be a silly. You didn't screech that way when you tumbled down yourself."

"'Twasn't you!"

"I won't have you crying when there's nothing to cry about. Girls cry!"

"Well, I'm a girl."

"You're not. Lizzie Pons is a girl. You're Sissy."

Come back, Don, come back just a minute to Sissy! I'm not crying!

And still the grassy track goes up to the wide sky, and the shadows of the fast-traveling clouds overhead move like sheep along the turf. And there, on the other side of the valley, the Tree-Ship is sailing, its green sails set for the open sea!

But Shirley was not ready yet to own how far the tide had taken her from her moorings. There are inhibitory forces at work in women after they have won through their first youth. Just when they need love most they are afraid! She was honest enough to admit that she had never seen Dale in a true perspective, that she had, in fact, underrated him. This little, well-made man, with the rounded cheek and smiling eye, had reserves behind which she had merely guessed at, never fathomed. It is not good for vanity to learn that your judgment was at fault; it is startling to find that the pool you have dipped your fingers in is deep enough to drown you! She began to quake at sight of the familiar figure hastening toward her, for Dale developed a perfect genius in those days for finding her wherever she was. His look of contentment as he settled himself beside her was beautiful to behold. He sat as near as conventions allowed. His hands strayed to the folds of her skirt, and smoothed them as

he talked. Her glance had no effect upon him; he always forgot next time. She felt helpless! The vitality of him, his smile, the curve of his mouth disturbed her. Worst of all were his silences, which he did not seem to think it needful to break.

"Why do you look at me so?" she asked, once, almost petulantly.

"I dare say I look as I feel," he answered, with that little pucker of his lips.

"I cannot make it seem real that you should care for me so."

"Everything is rather unreal to you, because you have been living a morbid life," he said, calmly. "The Sleeping Beauty might have gone around doing good, you know, and yet have been asleep all the time. She had to wait a hundred years, but you have not had to wait for me; I am the waiting person. They had more nerve in those days, I suppose," he added, brightly.

She was angry with herself for blushing.

"I thought it was Ruth."

"Pretty little girl," said Dale, lazily. "So you thought I did not know my own mind?"

"You were not at unity with yourself. I thought perhaps it was the money. You changed color when she was around."

"When you were around, you mean. Did you ever knock off persimmons after a frost? Some man will do that, one of these days, — and they will be sweet. At present, I should advise him to leave them on the tree."

"She is sweet now. She has been sweeter to me than I deserve," said Shirley, quickly.

"Because you were the frost."

She took that for rebuke.

"I do not think that I am so unloving as that."

"Do you fancy that I think you unloving? When I think what you have been to other women — That is one of the things you must teach me, what women are to one another. A man thinks he knows all about women because he knows how they act with him; but there is a whole world beside that he is out of."

"Yes, and that is what makes men's novels so empty at times; they do not know what a woman is like, alone with herself."

"I will tell you what you are like. Do you remember Christmas night, when we walked home on the snow in the moonlight? You are like that night to me."

"Glamor, laddie!"

"Don't!" he replied, sharply. "I will not be treated like the rest. I beg of you, do not say a word, do not smile, nor so much as let your sleeve brush me, unless you mean it. I shall call you to account. You are here by me; you are not tired of me. How I build on such things!"

"And if I let you build on them, how long would it last?"

He was silent so long that she looked up to see why he did not answer. That was what he was waiting for.

"If you mean, how long it will be a delight to me to be near you, to have your soul go hand in hand with mine . . . all my life."

She stroked a tuft of grass.

"I cannot prove it to you in words. You will have to take me on trust. You do not trust yourself to any one very much, do you know that?"

She opened her lips to speak, and stopped, for how

tell him that the new had always proved the old over again . . . never quite enough?

"They thought they loved you, I suppose," Dale mused. "They would not have given you up if they had." (For he had not learned yet that it is only the right man's persistence that is tolerable.) "A man says: 'I want you, but if you won't, why —' and calls it love. Another says: 'She was mine from the beginning, and I will wait forever to make her recognize me' — well, that is love. If they felt less, they never loved you."

"Perhaps I was not worth loving," said Shirley, with such sweet humor that he caught her hand and kissed it.

"Women like you are at a disadvantage. They start out with too much; nothing comes up to their ideal. I know I am not the ideal lover —"

"I hope not! He would be too good for me. You do not know women at all. They do not want an ideal lover; but they have an ideal of love."

"What is yours?"

"Rest." Her voice fluttered.

His mouth was very tender.

"Yes. What else?"

"Never to exhaust itself, or grow common. Always to be the same."

"Ah, yes," said Dale, "but that is like Alice in Looking-Glass Country. 'It takes all the running you can do to keep in the same place!' And the moral of that is, you are afraid to try me."

"I am afraid to have you try me! I have grown such a solitary. If you were to be sorry, ten years from now —"

"As to that, the advantage is all on your side. Ten years from now you will be just what you are now, but I shall be a little fa-at man with a bald head." He drew this picture with so much gloom that she laughed aloud. She laughed so much oftener now that there was some one to hear her! Every laugh was another link in the chain binding them together. For humor can mix with many minds, but for closest companionship it must have its own sort, or go lonely, and when two walk together who have the divine gift of laughter they see not as others see. They look on while a Romeo dies, and smile, knowing that life is deeper than its tragedy; and in the midst of carnival they drop a pungent speech, because they feel the sadness of the comedy. And so they laugh once more, just for relief; and the world which watches, uncomprehending, draws a sobbing breath when they are gone, and says: "Truly, these were gallant souls; they drew their cloaks bravely over their wounds."

But they were not wounds, beloved, they were the marks wherewith they were born.

"Are you going to say 'yes,' to-day, or must I ask the twenty times?" he inquired, going home.

"You have done that already!" said she.

"Not at all," he answered; "merely recapitulations."

But as they reached the garden gate he caught her hands to him in sudden passion.

"Oh, my love, we are wasting our lives, when we might be so happy!"

In the middle of the night Shirley woke. The wind swept the garden. Like a presence wild but not stormy it stole among the flowers, calling in oboë note, with

more breath than sound. She listened to its music with the same creep of pure delight that she had felt at fourteen. Was the mystery there yet, and for her? And if she tried to tell him, what would he answer?

But he did not come again for many days. She told herself that he was beginning to get over it. She was very glad she had not let herself go, — it was so much better! Why she should have felt angry with him at bottom, as if he had somehow betrayed her confidence, she would not consider. Surely there are women for whom the pains of love come first, its sweetness afterward!

Had Dale but known what was in her mind! Time had passed differently with him.

He had been surprised one morning by a call from Mrs. Wheeler. With the futile coquetry of a stout woman, the milliner had donned a waist of cotton net and a large hat with a mauve feather with her rainy-day skirt, and carried a pair of soiled white gloves in her hand. Her lip quivered in real distress.

"I'm so worried over that lot of mine, Mr. Dale, I don't know what to do!" she exclaimed, sinking into a chair.

"Why, how is that? I thought you had decided to rebuild."

"I had — almost — but — Well, Mr. Hitchcock wants to extend his store on that side. He says my husband owed him two hundred dollars, and he wants me to sell to him."

"Did you know about this debt?"

"I never heard a word about it before, and I don't — I was going to say I didn't believe it, either! But what you going to do? Mr. Hitchcock knows I can't afford

to lose two hundred dollars now, when I've got to stock up again. The worst is, I can't prove my husband didn't owe him, for he was the most careless man on earth about papers. Time and again I've said: 'Get it in writing, and then you know where you are,' but he never heeded me. And here I am in this fix."

"Why did not Mr. Hitchcock put in his claim against the estate?"

"There wasn't any estate, not to speak of," said Mrs. Wheeler, dabbing her eyes. "There was only my little half share of Sister's house, and my store that had been Pa's, and they couldn't take that away from me. A woman never gets fair play in this world. Mr. Hitchcock says he didn't say anything to me when Erastus died, because he didn't want to crowd me. He's always coveted my lot. He's got the best of my trade away from me, and now he wants to drive me out of business; but I'm not so dead as he thinks!"

"Have you consulted a lawyer?"

"Well, I thought I'd talk it over with you in a friendly way first, for I didn't know what a lawyer would charge me," said Mrs. Wheeler, naively. "They took some off my insurance, too; of course you wa'n't to blame for it. It does you good to talk things over with your minister. I don't suppose you want any pay for that?" with some archness.

"Certainly not, since I am not a lawyer," Dale answered, rather shortly. "My advice is not worth much, but it seems to me you are under no obligation to sell to Mr. Hitchcock until he has furnished proof of the debt. Ask him to do so."

"You don't know him," said Mrs. Wheeler, in a different tone. "When he wants a thing he don't let

anything stand in his way. There's something about him — I'm afraid of him! Whenever he comes into my store my hands turn cold, and I'm all of a tremble. I wish you would ask him for me, Mr. Dale! Tell him I am a poor woman, with my bread to earn." Her self-assertive manner had dropped off. This was the real woman, timid, cringing, envious.

In the end Dale consented, albeit with reluctance, but he had a reason for doing so. If her fears were justified, and Mr. Hitchcock were trying to put pressure upon her to sell, he had knowledge which could be brought to bear upon the situation.

CHAPTER THIRTY - THREE

HE called on his treasurer the next evening. The Hitchcocks' house had a pretentious tower, shingled like the rest in metallic brown. He was shown through the parlor with its velvet paper, its portières of bordered velour, its sofa cushions stiff with amateur embroidery, into the little room known as the "liberry," though a slender case of books was all it held. Mr. Hitchcock held out a thick, flabby hand without rising.

"How are you?" he asked. He meant to be cordial within limits, but a furtive antagonism lurked in his eye. Dale was too independent; he needed taking down.

"I suppose you've dropped in about that fund in the savings bank?" he remarked, presently. "You know it was left us for church purposes, and the committee think it had better be used to pay for the repairs on the spire. I dare say they have seen you?"

"Not yet," said Dale. "My errand is different. I came to ask you about that lot of Mrs. Wheeler's. She seems to be perplexed about her affairs just now."

"So you thought you would put in your oar, did you?" asked Mr. Hitchcock, disagreeably. As Dale remained politely attentive without replying, he continued with rising irritation:

"Ever since you came here you have been mixing yourself up with other people's business. This town

does not want a pope! You hadn't time for a full-length sermon Sunday evenings . . . you've had time enough to spare on the Gilmores, or on those dirty foreigners. I never approved of their being dragged into our church. The Catholic Church is the place for them; it's the religion they were born to. Then, you have been seen on the streets evenings with an outcast girl — ”

“ Pardon me,” Dale began. “ If you mean Miss Cole, I cannot allow any one to use that word of her. She is behaving well.”

“ That is neither here nor there,” Mr. Hitchcock answered. “ A minister has got to be careful of appearances. That isn't all. You've been running down the town in your sermons, and giving us a bad name outside. I've heard of that from several sources, and I can tell you there is dissatisfaction in the congregation over it. A minister's business is to preach the gospel, not to try to run the town — ” Dale's smile checked him. What was behind that smile? It was not sarcastic; more like the grim humor of one who recognizes a caricature of himself.

“ I agree with you in the main,” he replied, “ but I have noticed that the pastor who holds aloof from civic life is generally despised for it.”

“ Well, of course, we expect him to show some public spirit,” Mr. Hitchcock conceded; “ but when it comes to meddling with a man's private affairs it is carrying the thing too far.”

“ Mrs. Wheeler requested me to see you. As I understand it, she feels that you are putting pressure on her to induce her to sell to you.”

“ Not at all. If she puts it that way she misrepre-

sents the case. I made her a good offer. I don't mind telling you that I am thinking of enlarging my store. She can do what she likes about selling. She has a grudge against me because she thinks I have injured her trade. The woman has no head on her. She runs a sewing-machine at the back of her store, keeps customers waiting, and lets her stock get low. Now, I have an up-to-date department with a smart girl in charge, and when I get out of temporary quarters I am going to increase my facilities; but she can't see anything in a business light. It's all personal with her."

"Very likely. About this debt, have you any papers to show?"

"Certainly." Mr. Hitchcock rummaged in a drawer, and tossed over to Dale an old letter, written on a single sheet of ruled paper, and worn in the folds. It spoke of a "det" which the writer hoped to pay soon, and was apparently genuine; however —

"I do not see any sum mentioned," said Dale, looking up from its perusal.

"No," Mr. Hitchcock admitted. "I was a fool not to have taken more precautions, but he needed a lift, I had the bills on me, and I acted on impulse. No one thought of the man's dying suddenly like that."

Still Dale hesitated. It was so obviously out of character to impute philanthropic motives to the man before him. If he were taking advantage of some small loan to force the sale?

"You had no receipt for this?"

"No, it was a verbal transaction."

"Verbal, like your dealings with Terence McCarthy?" inquired Dale.

The pupils of Mr. Hitchcock's eyes contracted, and opened upon him with a fixed stare, while the hand which was abstractedly beating a tattoo on the table stopped.

"What are you talking about?" he asked, coldly.

"About the Old Mill," answered Dale. "It is known to more than one person that you are the real proprietor of that place."

A crash startled them both. Mr. Hitchcock had sprung to his feet and pushed back his chair so violently as to overturn a small tabouret at his side.

"Blackmail me, would you?" he panted. "Get out of my house . . . do you hear? . . . this instant —" he pounded the table with his coarse, mottled hands — "and don't you ever darken my door again!"

There was a moment of silence. Both men were breathing heavily.

"I am no blackmailer," said Dale, at last, speaking with slow emphasis. "Sit down, please; it is time for you and me to understand each other. Did it never occur to you that the unexpected might happen, and that the man you have made your tool might have stirrings of decency? You bought that shanty through him. You omitted to have the sale recorded. You allowed him to put in a few groceries as a blind. You extorted a dollar a day for each of those two crazy rooms overhead. You thought him vile enough to be safe. You never expected any scruples of his to trouble you. Well, the unexpected has happened. A young man — a mere boy — was stabbed in a brawl. McCarthy cared for him. In his way he loved him. You insisted upon his being removed at night before he had rallied from the shock; he had pneumonia. McCarthy made a

vow that, if he lived through it, he would get out of the business. Men do such things in hours like those, and they keep their vows!

"I have waited for certain proof before accusing a member of my church of downright immorality. It was from McCarthy himself that I had the story. How you can square your conduct with your conscience is more than I can see. I do not wish to lay the matter before the prudential committee unless you make it necessary, but I have others to think of . . . my boys. The offices of the church cannot be held by a man who is running a gambling-den in secret. One or the other must be given up."

"It's a lie! It's a conspiracy!" began Mr. Hitchcock hoarsely, when hurried footsteps sounded on the veranda outside, the curtains at the long window were pushed aside by an agitated hand, and Mrs. Hitchcock entered the room with outstretched arms, her commonplace features distorted as if a mask had slipped from the tragedy underneath.

"Don't! Don't!" she begged; "don't, Ruel, oh, don't say that! I can't stand it! I know it is true; you've changed so! Besides, Rilla Thomas insulted me when she came here to clean house. She had heard about that boy. I could not tell you then. It is no use asking you to do anything for me, but won't you please give it up for the girls' sake?" She paid no attention whatever to Dale.

"Shut the window; you'll be heard!" Mr. Hitchcock gasped. He was pinned between the chair and the table, and he leaned on the latter for support. His face had turned purple.

"I don't care who hears me," answered his wife

in a low tone of concentrated bitterness. "I have been through worse than that."

She swayed as she spoke, and pressed her hand to her side. Dale caught her to him in one arm, while he reached behind him to shut the window. The room had suddenly become so full of passion that it seemed as if a cyclone had swept it, yet nothing was out of place but the overturned tabouret. His face was stern and set. Pity might come later; what he felt at this moment was loathing. So might Saint George have looked at the dragon he was armed to slay. The man before him, cowering in his chair, gazed up at him fascinated. He never forgot the look that revealed him to himself.

"You want to ruin me, both of you," he muttered, thickly.

A long, dry sob burst from Mrs. Hitchcock. Not a muscle of Dale's tense face relented.

"Ruin?" he repeated, in a low tone; "what do you call ruin?"

Then he turned to the woman in his arms.

"Mrs. Hitchcock, this is too much for you," he began, gently.

"He's sick!" exclaimed Mrs. Hitchcock, springing forward. Her husband had sunk forward in a shapeless heap, and was breathing strangely.

She jerked at his tie, and loosened his collar.

"Go, telephone for Dr. Kent — the front hall — quick!" she ordered, in that maternal tone which carries all before it. Dale obeyed, and lent his help until Dr. Kent, an hour later, sent him home. It was an ugly attack, but he hoped the worst was over. He himself meant to remain through the night, giving

himself to the case without thanks, as his way was.

When it was known that Mr. Hitchcock had been ordered to the shore for a change, as soon as he was well enough to go, Waukomis said that he had overexerted himself at the fire. His wife assented to this so often that her own voice was hollow in her ears. It is one thing to defy opinion at a crisis, another thing to stand the test. She went to see Dale one night. Her husband had sent in his resignation as treasurer. Dr. Kent had told him to be careful. Did Mr. Dale know that that man — McCarthy, she believed his name was — was moving out of town? . . . and — did Mr. Dale think it was necessary to have any more said about it?

Behind her thick veil her features were rigid again. Another veil was down between them both. He had seen it lifted for the brief moment when she had dared to be herself. Whether she would love him or hate him for it she could not tell, until he spoke. At the sound of his voice tears sprang to her eyes, for he understood.

"No, I do not think so," he answered, thoughtfully. "I am very glad that he has taken this course. Tell him so, please; and if I can do anything for him before he goes, anything, remember —"

"He does not want to see you," said Mrs. Hitchcock.

Dale felt a pang.

The dragon had collapsed like pasteboard at the first threat of publicity, yet it had been a poor victory, after all. It needed little wit to see what would happen. The church would not willingly dispense with their treasurer's business ability. In a year, in a few months,

he would slip into his old place. Something had been gained for morals; but the man himself, with his rotten life, what would save him? That one should love him enough to die for him if need be . . . only Christ could do that!

"And you are no Christ," Linda had said once, in that tone that cut like steel. No one knew it better than himself. There was a hard spot in him somewhere. Who was he to ask a woman to love him?

Never had his spirit been lower than when he went down to the chapel late in the afternoon for a book he had forgotten. The windows were open, and from within came music, but not such as he was accustomed to hear there. For it was a powerful touch that gathered up all his self-questioning and bitterness and flung it forth to the air. He knew no one who played like that.

That afternoon Shirley had overseen the tuning of the piano, and had remained to put the room in order. The dreary interior, with its imitation stained-glass windows, and the crayon portrait of a former pastor, smote her with a forlorn sense of inanimate objects outlasting human life. Where were the sheaves of her thirty-one years? To shake off her mood she began to play, more strongly as her craving for expression grew, until she suddenly felt another presence near, and turned her head. Dale had entered by the other door, and was standing by the piano. She sprang up.

"Do not," he said. He was very pale.

"I beg pardon?"

"Do not start in that way at the sight of me. I did not know who was here. I have never heard you play. It is not my intention to intrude upon you. You mistake."

"It is not an intrusion for you to enter your own chapel," she answered, surprised. "I have been having the piano tuned, and I was just about to lock up."

"Wait," said Dale, with a little gesture which arrested her on the lowest step of the platform. He leaned against the piano.

"Let us understand each other. It is your misfortune as well as mine that you have not taken me seriously yet. I mean that you shall take me seriously, but not by forcing myself upon you. I will try some other way; only do not look at me again as if the sight of me were an annoyance to you. I cannot endure it."

"All this for me!" thought Shirley, with a tender woe no man can understand. She would have gone to him, but the old shrinking from emotion held her back. She moved away a few steps for her gloves. His voice followed her.

"I wish I could convince you that this is life or death to me."

She answered rather tremulously.

"At the great age to which I have attained, one is less open to conviction!"

"If you are going to throw those two years at me, I warn you that I shall trample on them."

"Well, trample," said Shirley, with her back to him, and started for the door.

There was a commotion behind her, and the jar of a heavy body falling, as Dale jumped from the platform and ran down the room. Reaching both arms around her, he grasped the door-knob.

"Oh-h! Let me go. I did not mean to have you rush at me!"

"What did you mean?" asked the minister, with set chin. He was a trifle out of breath, for he was no athlete, and he had jumped hard on both feet. One lock of his dark hair stuck out at right angles. Involuntarily she put up her hand to smooth it down. He bent his head toward the hand. His voice dropped to a bass hum, like a bee's.

"You do care for me, then?"

"Yes."

"Not very much?"

"Yes, very much."

"It is not just organized charity?"

She smiled, with an ironical curl of her lip. He dropped the door-knob.

"Kiss me, please? Once . . . just for a hostage?"

"A hostage . . . for what?"

"For more!" His lips grazed her cheek.

"Don't, please!"

"I wonder if you know how many times you have said 'don't' to me lately? We do not bring up children on 'don'ts' any more; we encourage them."

"You do not need encouragement; you seem to have had plenty of experience!"

"I have not," he answered, stiffly, drawing back.

"Well, for extemporaneous love-making —"

He glowered at her.

"I make love as the dog climbed the tree; he didn't know how, but he had to! I want your hand! Hadn't you better let yourself be loved? What are you afraid of — not me?"

"No. The — the situation."

"I did not make the situation; it made itself,"

said Dale. Still holding her by one hand, he went back to set up the piano-stool again.

"There!" said he. "Good-bye, old room, you are glorified forever. Did you ever hear Dr. Bertram preach? I am glad; he was an inspiration to me. Do you remember when he was picked up unconscious after that accident, how he said afterward that, before he had got his bearings at all, he felt such a flood of love for the whole world rush over him that it swept him down into deeps where he had never been, and he said to himself: 'Thank God, I've touched bottom before I die!' I know now how he felt."

"And I, too," she said. "Come, laddie, let us go home."

"Do you think you can put up with those 'secondary things'?" he asked, a half hour later.

He never had to ask again, such a sunny look she turned upon him.

"I like you all the better for that!"

"Do you? Do you like me? I honestly believe that you do — care for me; but do you like me? You did not at first."

"What makes you think so?"

He shot a glance at her that was loaded with fun.

"In a humble way we too have our intuitions!"

"Are you getting reconciled to the situation?" he asked, presently.

"Yes."

"When will you marry me?"

"Any time; but, Gordon, there is one thing I want to say. Do not love me for what I am not! I am not young, I am not gay. I can play at it, but it is intellectual, it is outside of me. Something died when

Don died. Has any one ever told you how it happened?"

"Yes."

"Look out there toward the brook," said Shirley. "Do you see the willow-tree? We fell in there once, when we were children, and he pulled me out without help, and then ran in crying — he was such a little fellow! No one ever had such a playmate. When he went to the Naval Academy I thought it would change, but he never changed. I used to sit on his bed to watch him pack. He always wore 'cit's' clothes at home, but he would put on his dress uniforms for Mamma and strut around with his cocked hat over one eye, to make her laugh. She died when he did. It was only her shell that lived on. She never cared for me as she did for her son.

"I do not grudge him to God; it was like him to die like that, but, oh, Gordon, I cannot control my dreams! I wake up in the night thinking that he is in danger, calling me . . . and he is dead! Love me — I need it — but do not ask me to be young!"

Tears stood on Gordon's cheeks. In silence he opened his arms, and she went to him. A great comfort folded her around. The man she had not meant to love, and loved, was strong enough.

"Dear love, I ask of you nothing but to be yourself," he murmured. "No, do not go yet — one minute longer. Together we will try to find a joy that will go as deep as the pain."

CHAPTER THIRTY - FOUR

“**N**OW are you satisfied?” demanded Ruth for the second time, pinning Shirley into a corner, where she stood, smiling and a trifle confused.

“Ruth, I thought —”

“Oh, I know what you thought,” Ruth interrupted. “You thought you were an old maid because your neighbors did, and you smothered yourself, and wouldn’t let yourself go; and you would not see that Hamlet was not going to meditate ‘To be or not to be’ forever. I saw it ages ago, and I told him yesterday that he had been fearfully slow, but I forgave him, and if he wanted to lecture me for anything now he might. He blushed, and beamed, and said that I was altogether too nice to be lectured. La! la! I never saw anybody so improved!”

“Daddy, I wish we knew more about our family,” she said to her father that evening.

“You want a family tree and a coat of arms, like the rest of them? I don’t know how to go about it myself, but other people do, and they’ll fix it for you. It will pass muster, — in this country.”

“I don’t want a coat of arms; I want roots, Daddy! Something to stand on, I do not care what. And if people like me then I shall know they mean it. Shirley says I must make them like me; that I must not let

money stand in the way. She says the real people will understand, if we are only real, ourselves."

"Real, ourselves," echoed her father, with a backward jerk of his mind over transactions of his in which nothing had been real except the gain he had made out of others' loss. That was real enough, he had thought, but that was before he had heard an impassioned young voice saying: "Money is myself, my greed, my prostituted ideals, my meanness." Strange how those words had stuck! And now here was his girl, with flushed cheeks, and the deep-set eyes of the thinker, demanding, not more luxury, but truth, honor, dignity. What Ruth wanted she had got to have. It was not the little parson, then, after all? Miss Shirley had seemed to think so, but Ruth protested that it had been Shirley all along, that she had seen it from the first. Mr. Gilmore was perplexed. He was not woman enough to perceive where the hurt was in the girl's consciousness; not that she had not been chosen, but, suppose she should not be worth choosing?

"Then I will take you over to Belfast to see the factories, and the old tenement house, if it has not been pulled down; but you'll be ashamed of your daddy."

"I shall not!" answered Ruth, hotly. "Let us all go over to see the old places, Daddy, and then we will come home and start fair."

And so Ruth, who had not been in love, but who had felt the sting of love's wing in passing, took herself abroad with her father, and out of this story.

"I am sure I have no objection," said Ada Kent, when David told her that they had gone; but her acid tone betrayed sharp vexation. Nothing, at least,

nothing that was worth anything, had come of her acquaintance with the Gilmores; and now Dale, who had presumed to be amused at her, was going to marry Putty Face, whom she detested. She hated women who posed. With a look which said ineffable things, she settled herself anew in the hammock with her library book, — the romantic adventures of an anonymous Somebody who had been photographed in a mummy case, and, with some confusion of ideas, had labeled the picture: "To many a Sphinx!" That was what Ada longed to be, a Sphinx to many; and here she was vegetating in this hole! As often as she mentioned Burford, David whistled!

He was whistling now as he moved about his den. That afternoon he had happened to meet Shirley on the hill just beyond her garden gate. It was some time since he had been at her house. The day might come when she had had time to forget those words of Ada's, and everything would be again as it used to be; but he could never forget that the words had been said. Besides, the pale pink scarf she had thrown over her white dress made him feel shy. An armful of roses would not have spoken more plainly of the blooming out of her life. And so he had said his word of congratulation in a rather halting fashion, and was going on; but Shirley — how like a child she was sometimes! — had sprung forward and caught his hands up to her, saying in her impulsive way of old:

"David, dear! David, dear! I can't let you go like that. Say you're glad."

Yes, he was glad.

How cruel a girl's life was. Only the easy-going got through without scars. He wondered if he saw it better

for being a doctor. They had both lost in the game, both renounced, and gone on. It had been the unspoken bond in their friendship. And now? He crossed the room to the mantel, to look at the fading photograph. It was like that she had looked that afternoon, *young*. Well, he was glad. He was growing old himself, and romance was over for him; but such as David Kent have their compensations.

"If that sweet woman should ever have a child, she would call upon me," was his wordless thought, and he clenched his hand in a sudden sense of power which was so profound as to be almost happiness.

Shirley was growing used to her happiness rapidly; it is easier than one thinks! She was amused to find how much more convincing it was to her neighbors than living for them had been. At a stroke, she had regained all her old importance in the village.

"It didn't really matter a bit what kind of a soul I had, or whether I had one at all; that didn't count!" she confided to Dale in one of her merry moods.

"We can't gossip about souls — too nebulous," he remarked.

"I believe you detest your surroundings."

"No, I don't. As a background for 'A Soul,' now —"

But she had slipped from his too-confident arm, and the hall echoed their gay laughter.

"Food for gossips," was his greeting another morning, as he appeared before her dining-room window, and swung himself lightly over the sill.

"Well-a-day! It is barely eight o'clock."

"I told you I should come before breakfast," he answered. "Has the millinery lady arrived? No? There's method in my madness. I'm going to sneak out

by the back gate when I go; she's too 'int'rested.' Please, may I have a little of something, just to 'play house'?"

"Yes, indeed. Bring another teacup from the cupboard; the Coalport one."

"I won't have the company cup," he objected.

"Another one like mine, then."

"There is one thing I have made up my mind about," he said, after a contented sigh. "When we are married the millinery lady has got to go! Ruth scolded me about her being here, as if I were responsible. She said your house was your shell, and if your shell were broken you would die."

"Did she say that? Poor little Ruth!"

"My heart went down into my boots. I thought of those grisly skeleton hats in your sitting-room window. Let her rebuild on her own lot, but the millinery lady has got to go, purple feather and all."

"I think we had better make a parsonage of this house. That room would make a delightful study, and we will have a new paper and carpet, with no scrolls and centipedes. What are you looking so set about?"

"I want to pay for our house myself," he said, obstinately.

"I'll let you pay my taxes," said Shirley. "Perhaps you will be sorry you offered!"

"Little you know. A man never feels that his wife belongs to him, until he has spent money for her that he earned himself."

He came back that noon very grave. A telegram from Mrs. Dale had summoned him home. His father had had a stroke of paralysis. He went to New York that afternoon, and during the days that followed Shirley

had time to reflect upon the wonderful change in her life, when such intimate, unreserved letters were her daily portion. His father's right arm was helpless, Gordon said. He spoke indistinctly, but he was rallying; still, the case was serious.

At the end of a week he returned. His father had asked to see her. The church would give him his vacation then. Would she come back with him?

"He is very feeble. It will not be pleasant for you there." He compressed his lips as if he would say more, but refrained.

"My home is where you are!" he exclaimed, with passion.

In the glow of a still September afternoon, they went through the house together, locking windows. As Shirley gave the key of the front door to Dale, and he slipped it on his ring, she felt that she had indeed surrendered herself, and that the old existence had closed behind her. How strange it seemed, after her long seclusion, to be plunged into the thick of things! The sight of the great city looming through the haze quickened her pulse. A short drive through a cross-street in the upper forties, and they had stopped in front of a house with nothing distinctive in its exterior.

"Here we are," said Gordon, but his voice sounded dull, and the hand which grasped hers to help her up the steps felt cold through her glove. She had a quick impression of a parlor furnished in conventional good taste, without a single object to speak of family associations, when she became aware that some one had entered the room, and was regarding her with intense curiosity. Mrs. Dale had just left the sick-room, but her coppery hair was smooth, her embroidered linen

waist spotless. She wore a walking skirt of dark blue-purple. She offered her hand in a matter-of-fact way to Shirley, but not to Dale, whom she nevertheless addressed as Gordon.

"He is about the same," she replied to his question. "The nurse is giving him his treatment now. In a little while you can see him. Gordon wishes you to have his room, Miss DeForest," she explained, leading the way up another flight of stairs to a large front room. When Shirley saw the heavy, rather ugly furniture, banished from the rooms below, mingled with lighter, more graceful articles of Dale's own choice, she understood. Left alone, she went over to the mantel. Above hung a portrait. The painter had given it a fictitious smoothness, yet it was possible to read in the likeness of that rosy-cheeked young matron with the coronet braid something of what Miss Jean Gordon had been; good, affectionate, literal, and rather narrow, with no humor and little gayety. Most men idealize their mothers after they are dead. Gordon had done so with determination.

"Coming," she answered, to his tap on the door, and they ran down-stairs together. The nurse nodded cheerfully, and stood aside. Mr. Dale lay with his head sunk deep in his pillows. His right arm rested inert on the bedclothes, his eyes, too near together, scrutinized the newcomer closely. In spite of its flabby flesh, and the coarse lines which told of sensuality and self-will, she had on the instant a sickening perception that the face was like Gordon's; that Gordon, given the same loosening of moral fiber, would look like that.

"So that's the woman, is it?" asked Mr. Dale, in a thick, harsh voice.

Gordon bit his lip angrily, but before he could speak a softer voice answered.

"Yes," said Shirley, "this is the woman," and moving forward a step or two, she looked down at him kindly, unembarrassed.

"Humph! Shake hands," said Mr. Dale, drawing his other hand out of the clothes with difficulty. "It's the left hand; I'm tied here hard and fast. Bring a chair, Gordon. You can leave Miss DeForest with me; I have something to say to her. Come, do you take me for an ogre?" He chuckled at his son's evident reluctance.

Dale silently left the room.

"So you are going to marry my son?" began Mr. Dale.

She assented.

"I suppose you know he has nothing but his salary to count on? If he had followed my wishes for him he might have been making money hand over fist by this time, but he has chosen to set himself against me, and he must take the consequences." He spoke as one aggrieved. "So don't talk the usual rubbish about being happy together in poverty, and that sort of thing."

"Very well, I will not," said Shirley.

The sick man opened his eyes upon her with a gleam of humor.

"Check!" he exclaimed, and looked her over critically, with increasing speculation in his keen gaze.

"How did you get your grey hair?" he inquired.

She winced at that, it was so unlike her own father's courtly manner. Very simply she outlined her family history.

"Well, that was life; that was living!" was his comment. "If Gordon had hankered for the Navy I would not have hindered him. But Gordon never had any red blood in him! Wouldn't play football at college, said there was 'too much slugging in it'!"

"Would you rather he had made a name at football than to have saved that child's life when he was a motor-man?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Mr. Dale. "What do you mean by his being a motor-man? Gordon could not run a car if he tried; he hasn't the *sand*!" His tone had something comic in it. Mr. Dale was, in fact, disarmed. He knew a lady when he saw one. This little lady regarding him alertly, with her chin in her hand, was not the simpering country girl he had somehow prepared himself to see.

"Did Gordon never tell you how he spent his first summer vacation while he was at the Seminary?"

"He never tells me anything. He is the closest-mouthed fellow I ever met with."

"Nor about the fire?" She told that story, while he listened greedily, half in pride, half in contempt.

"Just like him, to have been thinking of books. If he had had his wits about him, he would have seen to the man first."

"Oh, don't!" she cried, too late, for the door had opened just in time to let Gordon hear his father's speech. He stood still as if he had taken a blow, and his look betrayed his suffering, but he offered no word in his own defence. His silence, his patience, which had something dogged in its quality, irritated his father to the last degree.

"Ay, there he stands, who might be doing a man's

work among men. Little he cares to please his father; he comes home because he thinks it his 'duty.' I hate your dutiful prigs; they're always after the loaves and the fishes — "

Shirley sprang toward Gordon, and throwing her arms around him, turned to face his accuser, her intense face charged with uncontrollable feeling.

"You know better!"

"Do I? Do I?" answered Mr. Dale, and muttered two or three indistinguishable words, still looking at them both as if fascinated. The sight of his son's face working with emotion seemed to gratify him.

The nurse came forward with a glass of medicine.

"You had better go now," she whispered.

"Stay where y'are," the invalid commanded. "Take away — I 'o' wa' it — "

"Give it to me," said Mrs. Dale, reappearing at that moment. "Here, Bob, take it."

He obeyed immediately, and she laid a cool hand on his forehead.

"Don't leave me, Linda," he begged.

"No; go to sleep," she replied, making a sign to the others to go.

"That is how it is always; she steps in between us," said Dale, afterward.

"It was time for us to go; he was tired. We ought to be glad that Mrs. Dale can quiet him in that way."

"Oh, I am always in the wrong," he admitted. "The whole thing goes against me."

"Do you know, his disappointment about you seems pathetic? Like the poor little girl who was so disappointed with some flowers I took to her because they

were not 'paper ones with motters' like what they had 'off the Christmas tree'!"

He smiled ruefully.

"From his point of view he is right. What have I to show for my eighteen months at Waukomis? If the vision has come to any, it has been to the poor or the despised, — Myrtie, Paul, Granny Akers."

"That was the case with the first ministry," she answered.

"True. You do not think me all a failure, then?"

There was a suspicious dimness in her eyes as she looked up at him.

"I think you a good deal of a success!"

CHAPTER THIRTY - FIVE

"IT is doing you a great deal of good," said May Dunham, surveying Shirley in her large, attentive way, one arm hanging over the back of her chair, the other resting on her writing-table. Its denim top really masked a cook-stove which had been allowed to remain in her third-story room. She kept her manuscripts in the oven, and declared the arrangement stimulating.

"You had an out-of-the-world air, like one of Christina Rossetti's women, but now you look waked-up, and different, somehow," she went on.

"I have knocked off some of my notions, I hope," answered Shirley, easily. "If you had come to stay with me again, I should have let you go halves."

May looked extremely pleased. Honesty in women was part of her creed. She tried to live up to it, and had owned to herself long ago that she had entirely misread Dale — the joke was on her, she would have said if she had been a girl of humor — but it is to be feared that the episode had been thrust as far back as possible into a pigeonhole of her consciousness.

"I saw from the first that he admired you very much, and I do hope you will be happy, Shirley. He is such a nice, earnest little man — but perhaps I ought not to call him little?"

"Why not?" Shirley asked. When she had left the settlement far behind, and turned into the avenue, for

the pleasure of walking home in the face of the cool yellow sunset, she smiled to herself.

More than one man looked twice at her slight figure in its grey suit, for in spite of her extremely simple style, Miss DeForest had the distinction of a woman who never has to think about her manner. She liked the aspect of the streets, the keen faces, the florists' shops, the rattle of passing cabs. It made a contrast to the singular situation in which she had found herself for the past three weeks.

She understood now more than Gordon had ever told her, but he was mistaken in thinking it unlike anything she had known. There was this in common with that miserable time when her father's judgment had failed, and her mother began to take laudanum in secret, the same feeling of oppression in the moral atmosphere, the same strained silence in the face of things which must not be put into words. The horror of a sinking life was on her yet. She had never dreamed that any power could come from it, but she was with Gordon now, inside of it with him, and they both knew it. It was plain that, by his father, at least, she was being accepted as a part of the household. Mr. Dale sent for her every day. She soon discovered that the conversation always worked around to Gordon, that the father was full of curiosity about his son. Mrs. Dale watched them with cool scrutiny. Gordon addressed only necessary remarks to her, leaving Shirley, if she chose, as she often did, to bridge over awkward moments. Nothing could have been more monotonous than their daily routine, governed in everything by an invalid's requirements, but she had an instinctive sense of something brooding under the surface which would discharge

itself into the thick air at some unexpected moment, and change their relations, for better or worse.

Yet, as she entered Mr. Dale's room, she heard nothing more disturbing than his loud, harsh laugh. Gordon was reading aloud from a letter; he turned quickly.

"Do listen, Shirley! It's from Billy . . . about Deacon Branch, here it is: '—walked in ahead of everybody like he always does, and sat right down on the fly-paper. You see, Father had been looking at some maps, and put it in the big chair, and forgot to put it back.

" "Look out, Ithamar!" he called, but it was too late. We took hold opposite corners, and pulled, and it went zip! and some of it came off, and some didn't, and anyhow he couldn't have sat down because he would have stuck. You never saw anybody so rattled; he just diddled up and down. "This is tedious enough! This is tedious enough!" says he.

" 'Father looked awful solemn, like when he has to pass the plate in church. He brought his best trousers. I wish you could have seen him in them! You know, he sits tall, but his knees come low down, and he had to turn them up a yard . . . honest. It took Mother and me all the afternoon to get the stuff off. Father's called it "Tanglepants" ever since.

" 'Reubena stretched her rubberneck over the fence and ate up Mother's new Rambler rose. That horse is a rhinoceros. The Messenger Band is O. K. I've taken two messenges myself. Dr. Kent says Granny Akers is failing. Aren't you coming home pretty soon?

" 'Your sincere friend,

" 'WILLIAM GAYLORD LEMMON.' "

"I never knew you had any fun in you, Gordon," Mr. Dale remarked, as Gordon finished the letter.

Gordon looked up.

"It strikes me that, considering that I am your only son, you know very little about me," said he.

"Whose fault is that?" asked his father, testily.

"Partly mine, partly yours," Gordon answered. "I was wrong to let anything come between us; but you denied me my right to choose my own path in life. You said things to me that no man can take from another, even his own father."

"I was hasty, I admit," said Mr. Dale, in a mollified tone. Oddly enough, the reproach made him more comfortable; it was Gordon's drawing back into his shell, as he expressed it, that angered him. "It is natural for a man to want his son to succeed. There was a time when there were a good many plums waiting for a fellow with a long head and a little capital. I could have put you in the way of them, then; I was not the stick I am now. There was that irrigation scheme; or you might have gone into Wall Street. You remember 'Duffer' Collins, as you used to call him? He has just bought a seat in the Stock Exchange, and Fitch is doing a great trade in Mexico. The day of fifty-cent enterprises is over; this is the day of big things, — and you threw away your chances — for what? A billet in a country town!"

"Yes, Pater," said Dale, and somehow the old word eased the stiffness between them a little; "I know all that, and I never pretended that the plums were sour; but only a few weeks ago a man who has plenty of them asked me what he could do to get more out of life.

Given his circumstances, I might have lost my bearings, like him. It won't hurt me to realize it; I can get nearer to my people. I know a minister is not an oracle any more. He must prove himself, like other men, but if he tells what he honestly sees, he will be believed. And this is what I see everywhere: the network of capital, the worship of the will, efflorescence of material life; and in the midst of it all is a power compared with which our self-willed achievement is like the struggle of ants in a hill. That power is the spirit of the living God, blowing where it listeth, speaking with a still, small voice; and the ultimate test of our civilization, any civilization, is whether it is with or without that spirit. The day of big things is here. I have chosen the biggest! To bear witness to that power I would pledge two lives if I had them, — and, Father, I wish you could show me a little sympathy."

"You preach well, my boy," said Mr. Dale, dryly, closing his eyes as if to end the conversation; but he was not displeased. A parson's was a worn-out trade, but if he were going to make a success of it, why — Linda had seemed to think that he would not be a success. That only showed that even a smart woman could be mistaken. Too bad they had never hit it off better; Linda had never thought much of Gordon.

But Shirley knew better than that. She had come to think of this other woman simply as another human being, without reference to the relations they stood in, and she saw that she suffered. The lines in her handsome face had sharpened; her movements betrayed nervous strain.

"You have been gone an age. Where have you

been?" demanded her husband, irritably, one afternoon, as she returned from shopping.

"There was a linen sale, and I thought I had better get some more towels."

"Just like a woman — spends car fare down and back, and has lunch at Clark's, in order to buy something a penny or two cheaper."

"You must not expect us poor women to have your judgment," Linda Dale replied, good-humoredly, smoothing the pillows. A self-complacent smile spread itself slowly over the sick man's countenance.

"Well, I don't know. I know one woman who has pretty good judgment," he answered.

"Merci, Monsieur." She made him a little courtesy.

"Send the nurse off for a constitutional, and come and fan me, Linda."

"It is something like to have a woman like that at your beck and call," he remarked to Shirley, as his wife left the room to obey his behest. "Always comes to time; never makes a fuss; always has an answer ready. I like a little ginger in a woman. Your good women are like pre-digested breakfast foods, — flat."

"Your experience has not been extensive enough for such sweeping generalizations," suggested Shirley, not at all disturbed.

Mr. Dale chuckled. This little woman with the grey hair and fearless manner amused him.

"Eh, Linda? What do you think Miss DeForest says? She says I don't know enough about good women to generalize."

Shirley made a swift gesture of protest, while the color flew into her cheeks. Her eyes met a quick, searching glance from Mrs. Dale's. It was like a clash

of armed forces over the head of the sick man, who smiled fatuously, comprehending nothing.

"One on one side, one on the other; that's comfy," he murmured. "Fan me, Linda."

She fanned him steadily until he went to sleep, and then gave place to the nurse. As she left the room, followed by Shirley, she turned in the doorway, and looked back at the helpless form on the bed with such deliberate, concentrated disdain that Shirley was shocked.

"Oh!" she exclaimed under her breath, "how can you look at him like that?"

For answer, Mrs. Dale opened the door of her own room, and motioned to her to enter. It was furnished with some luxury, although of a restrained kind. "Sit down," said Mrs. Dale, indicating an easy chair facing the window, before which she took her own stand, her back to the light, her hands grasping the window-sill behind her.

"What kind of a woman are you?"

Shirley's heart beat quickly. No conventionalities would answer here; it was the thrust of soul on soul. She considered her words.

"I was an undisciplined girl once. I wanted and expected everything. Our troubles came, and I found myself a woman, with all the lessons of life to learn."

"Have you learned them?" asked Mrs. Dale.

"I think so."

"Then," said Mrs. Dale, "you have learned what men are. You know their vanity, their weakness, their brutality. They think themselves masters, and they are slaves. That man in there would turn a woman out of his house the moment it suited his convenience.

He has no loyalty. He is a mean, little, sordid creature. I care nothing for him, and that gives me a hold over him. If I were foolish enough to care for him, he would make me suffer for it; those are his instincts. What a life!"

Her face twitched. She had repressed herself too long. Shirley thought a minute.

"And yet you are wearing yourself out for him. It seems to me that you are not the woman to do that without a motive. Is it duty?"

"No. I owe him no duty."

"Then what keeps you here?"

"Gordon," answered Mrs. Dale, coolly. "He interests me. I am waiting to see the end of the story. Gordon has hated me from the first. By rights I ought to hate him. I should if he were like his father. He is like him in some ways, but he is not mean. He is proud, he is fond of money, he is secretive, but he is not mean. I have wondered what sort of woman would attract him. Do you think it is all for yourself that he cares for you? It is for your family, for other things. Gordon likes what has the hall-mark on it."

"I am not disposed to quarrel with him for that," Shirley answered.

"Then what brings you here?" asked Mrs. Dale. "Do you find it in this house? That man in there — I have seen you shrink from him. He may live for years; he may die horribly. Gordon has it in him to be like him. Are you not afraid?"

"No," said Shirley. "You have just said that he was not mean."

"He is hard," said Mrs. Dale. "You will find that he is hard." In spite of herself her voice altered.

"Mrs. Dale," said Shirley, gently, "you care for Gordon."

"What if I do?" she answered, recklessly. "He is the only man I know who knows his own weakness, who does not worship 'strength.' I have always cared for him. He hates me, but that is neither here nor there. Oh, no doubt you are shocked to hear me say so. You have been shielded and petted in your little provincial existence, and you are not used to hearing things put into plain words."

"No, I am not shocked," replied Shirley, slowly. "I wish you cared for him more; I wish you loved him."

A faint red came out on Mrs. Dale's cheek, as if a lash had struck it.

"You wish that I loved him, you? Are you a school-girl to prate in that soft fashion? What do you know about love? Do you think I would let you or any other woman stand in my way if I loved a man? I would have him for myself, or ruin him!"

"You would not," Shirley returned. "He would be your Self; you would not dare. You care for Gordon, and the little love that damns has made you torment him. A great love would have killed the desire to torment him. You alienated his father from him, you spoiled his home for him. You have forced yourself upon him, to make him feel your influence. You have tried to make him accept your estimates of life, and you have failed. If you had succeeded, you would have despised him. It is because he is good that you care for him. If you loved him, you would take your hand off from his life. If you loved him, you would give what cost you most. The travail of your soul would not be

enough to offer,—if you loved him! Men are not our slaves; they are not our masters; they are our children!”

“What do you know about such things? You never had a child!” Mrs. Dale’s breath came quickly, as if she had been running.

“I know more than you,” Shirley answered. “It is not for you to teach me. You say that I have led a sheltered life. I have been so thrust back upon myself that I have had to go to the roots of things, or perish. Do you think I will ever grudge Gordon the love of other women? I would have the world clinging to his hands! Mankind are our children, the world is our possession, — and I am sorry, sorry for you, Mrs. Dale; you’ve missed your birthright!”

Linda Dale stood long with face averted, looking out of the window. At last she turned around.

“Before you came I thought that I should hate you, but I don’t, somehow; I don’t know why.”

Shirley rose. The other woman’s personality had disturbed her powerfully; she felt spent.

“Where are you going?”

“Up-stairs, to lie down.”

“You can rest here; I will leave you to yourself,” and Mrs. Dale fluffed up the couch cushions with deft movements. Something prompted Shirley to yield. When Mrs. Dale returned after a considerable interval, she found her asleep, one hand, with Gordon’s plain gold ring on it, lying outside of the shawl.

“How distinguished she is with those dark eyebrows, like a Frenchwoman of the old *régime*,” she mused. “There are lines at the corners of her mouth; they will always be there. I look as young as she; I am as young as she for all that really matters. She

will be the daughter of the house. Bob likes her because she is fearless. . . . Oh, to be with people who think, and breathe, and dare, instead of puppets who can be worked by strings! I never meant to endure it a day longer than it suited me; why did I not go before? He may live for years.

"And Gordon loves her — yes, it is love! I may care for him too if I like, she is so sure of him . . . very kind!" Her face twitched in bitter irony, for she had the gift of a complex nature, to jeer at herself. She remembered how she had once bent to kiss the boy of eighteen, and he had drawn his head back, and she had felt herself condemned by a boy's hard judgment; and how the desire to punish, to make him suffer had become an object in life. What had it been worth, after all! "The little love that damns" — that was what she had called it. Linda Dale in that hour wandered over the arid wastes of a loveless life, and scorned herself.

The door stood ajar. After a time she heard Gordon leave his father's room and go, first, up-stairs, then down to the parlors. As he came up for the second time she stepped into the hall.

"Do you know where Miss DeForest is?" he asked.

"She is lying down in my room," she answered, marking his evident displeasure with satisfaction. Shirley awoke at the sound of voices, and went to the door.

"Do you want me, Gordon?"

"Don't I always want you?" he asked, pointedly, and they went down to the library. Its windows opened upon the rear balcony, where clematis vines made a cheerful struggle for existence.

"I wish you would not stay in her room," he began, irritably — how scold a little lady a bit your senior, with one fair cheek pink from sleep?

"Gordon, I am so sorry for Mrs. Dale!" she replied, very low. "She has great force, she was made for great things, and her mind preys upon itself, and perverts her feelings."

"She has no right to pervert others' feelings," said Gordon, sternly; but his face presently softened.

"Do you know what my father wants? He wants to have us married in his room — soon."

She flushed a little, but replied:

"Very well."

"You do not mind?"

"Do you?"

"He will insist upon Mrs. Dale's being present. I cannot stand that."

She said nothing. He looked at her.

"You understand, dear?"

"Yes."

"You do not care?" in a hurt tone.

"Not very much."

"That our wedding should be spoiled?"

She leaned against him a moment.

"I do not care at all."

"I thought you would feel with me in what I have been forced to bear — in my mother's home."

"I do; oh, I do!"

He was silent for some time.

"Don't ask me!" he broke out. "If you knew how it hurts to see you together! You are as far apart as heaven and hell."

She slipped to the floor beside him.

"Don't kneel to me," he said, sharply, but he might as well have tried to stop the wind. Her arms were around his neck, her face was close to his, as she answered, between laughing and crying:

"O laddie, laddie, what do you know of heaven and hell? They are not far apart, they are bound up together . . . they always were, and they always will be . . . next door, and up the stairs, and around the corner, just as now, only, evil will not prevail forever. Shall we let it prevail now?"

He held her off to see what she meant.

"You mean that I have let it prevail over me?"

"Gordon, conquer by the full heart, not by resistance."

He laid his head against her like a child. She felt his struggle as if it had been her own — for she could never have borne what he had borne! Oh, if she could only make it up to him!

Still he did not move. It was the crisis of his life, and he knew it. He knew that it had not been wholly the revolt of a pure spirit against evil; it had been the hurt to his pride that he could not forgive! Could he give all for love's sake?

When he raised his head at last his face was drawn, and his voice was low and broken.

"I have been all wrong," he murmured. "Have it as you will."

CHAPTER THIRTY - SIX

WITH masculine disregard of all but sentiment, Dale decreed that Shirley was to wear at her wedding "the white dress with elbow sleeves that you had on that night." In vain she objected that it was worn out, that it would fall to pieces if washed.

"You were like an old picture," he persisted. "I want you to wear it once more, to please me, and then we will put it away, and keep it to look at;" and so she yielded.

"Leave it with me," suggested Mrs. Dale, when Shirley asked for the address of a competent laundress. A few days later, she brought it up to her room, ironed with exquisite care. Shirley praised the work, and offered to pay an extra fee.

"There is nothing to pay; I did it myself," said Mrs. Dale; "it is nothing," disclaiming her warm thanks in a matter-of-fact way. And indeed the relations between the two would hardly bear demonstrative expression, although it was an accepted thing by them both that they were without hostility.

Nevertheless, when the day came, she did not offer to help Shirley to dress. She busied herself in her husband's room in the morning, arranging one or two bowls of roses with her own peculiar skill. She had helped him into his silk jacket, and left him propped up a little by an extra pillow. Now she stood at her

own window, dressed in the lavender foulard which she had worn for several days in succession that she might not seem to have dressed for the occasion, if anything happened to keep her out of the room, — to such petty calculations had she come, who had longed for large experiences. The door was ajar, not closed. She knew that Gordon would resent her presence. It was not that she had usurped his mother's place — he would have got over the sting of that long ago; he had hardened himself against her because she had tried to influence him.

"You have not been loyal. You have not been true." Well, were they all loyal, these men? She laughed to herself bitterly. Suppose she had tried harder? He had her to thank for it that she had not let herself go altogether; or was it that she had been, at bottom, afraid? Being good gave a man an awful advantage. They might remember that sometimes! But no, they were abject, or else they were hard.

*"Dis qu'as-tu fait, toi que voilà,
De ta jeunesse?"*

Nothing. She had been the sport of contending forces, and they had made her powerless.

A knock startled her. In all the years she had spent in that house, that hand had never knocked at her door.

"Come in," she called, in a voice that was not her own.

The door swung open, and Gordon stood on the threshold, wearing the preternaturally well-groomed look of a man on his wedding-day. Their eyes met,

surprise in hers, in his, a mute confession. He made a stiff little bow.

"We wait for you."

The floor seemed to rise under her feet as she crossed the room to the hall. For the first time his eyes had met hers without that veiled condemnation. Why had he looked sorry?

"There you are, Linda," said Mr. Dale, turning his head at her entrance. He motioned to her to stand beside his bed, but her eyes were not for him. In her white dress, without veil or ornaments, Shirley had stepped forward to meet Gordon. Mr. Aldrich, the elderly minister, opened his prayer-book. In the background, the nurse looked on with cheerful, detached expression. It was unlike any wedding she had ever seen, yet there was something exciting about it.

Linda Dale watched the two faces hungrily. The primitive joys were not for her. That other woman knew; she had touched the raw spot. Ah, yes, they loved each other! But why had Gordon looked sorry?

It was over, and Shirley knelt to kiss the face in the pillows.

"That's nice," he said, in the complacent tone she disliked; "well, my boy!" and, as Gordon took the feeble left hand, it pulled him nearer, and to his own surprise he gave his father a hearty hug.

"Now, Linda, it's your turn," murmured Mr. Dale, with satisfaction. "Why, where is she?"

Gordon turned his head.

Mrs. Dale had left the room.

.

That next day, while Shirley and Gordon sat writing at the library table, neither inclined to talk much, a telegram from Dr. Kent was brought to them. Gordon read it, made a sound of distress, and handed it to Shirley.

"Mrs. Akers failing rapidly. Asks for you."

"I will take the evening train, and come back in a few days to bring you home," said Dale, and Shirley assented, feeling that her place was here, much as she wanted to see the dear old woman. She went with him to pack his bag. He came down at dusk, and looked around nervously for Mrs. Dale. His feelings had softened wonderfully in the last few days, and something was growing in his mind which must be said now, if ever.

He found her in the rear balcony. The walled yard beyond received a dim light from above, like a well. It showed her worn face with its thin-lipped mouth, drooping at the corners like a child's. She had grown old lately, and he noticed it with a vague pity which found no voice. The antagonism between them had lasted too long. He could not choose but be stiff.

"Before I go I wish to say to you that I feel that I have been in the wrong in some respects. Will you accept the acknowledgment? It is honestly meant."

"Gordon!"

Was this woman with features working convulsively the woman of steel he had thought her? No stronger than a bridge when its key-note is sounded, she was visibly shaken.

"Why do you say that to me?" she demanded, with a quick, gasping breath. "Did *she* ask you?"

"My wife? Certainly not."

She grasped the balcony railing.

"Ah!" she breathed, "but you have been hard!"

"I dare say I have," he answered, humbly enough.

"At least, I can thank you for your care of my father."

"Stop!" she cried, in the wild impulse to free herself for once of the warped feelings which had controlled her so long — to make him listen. At such a crisis the woman's instinct is to state the case, the man's, to avoid a scene. Both instincts are selfish, but the woman is fighting for her life.

"It was not for him; you know it. It was — something else that kept me here. It matters nothing to me what you think, or whether you care, only, speak truth . . . do not pretend."

"I will not pretend not to understand you in part," he answered, awkwardly, a good deal embarrassed.

"You were always there, always in the background. First as boy, and then as man, you scorned and detested me. What did you know of my life? You never asked! I might tell you that your suspicions of me were unjust. I shall not. What you think is true. Judge me as you will now . . . think the worst. I have given you the right."

But even in the dusk she could see how his face had changed at the words, wrung out of a bitter heart.

"Linda . . . have I hurt you — like that? I did not know. I am sorry!"

It had come at last, the word of tenderness she craved. Oh, why had it not come before, while he was free? For a moment her poisoned imagination would have its way. She could have had power over him if he had not resisted. She had lost the game because she had not been bad enough. Had either of them

been that rare thing, a character at unity with itself for good or evil, who knows how their long duel might have ended? Life is like that, full of stories with no dénouement, of tragedies that never take place.

Linda Dale was a woman without illusions. She knew that the power to say that word had come to him through love. He could be tender now because his heart was full. The man who was humble—the woman who was generous—together, they had won.

“Gordon,” she said, in quick contradiction, “I am not so bad as you think! I was all alone in the world . . . I knew nothing of life. I will tell you all.”

“No,” he answered, “do not. I do not wish to know. I wish to think of you as you are now. Put it all by. Let it be as if you had given me a sealed box to keep for you. Believe me, I will be faithful to the trust.”

They were standing side by side. With a sudden movement she turned and threw her arms around him for a moment. A smothered sob broke from her. She felt his muscles quiver, she heard the quick breath he drew in. He stood passive, but Heaven knew what was in his heart, as the tears welled up in his eyes.

That moment made Gordon Dale a priest.

.

Granny Akers woke, late one afternoon, to find herself alone in her bedroom. Sounds came from the back of the house, and she lay still, and listened. For some days she had been struggling with the conviction that she was going to die.

"Seems strange, don't it?" she had said to Dale, the first day he came. "This is a good world; I'm nowise tired of it yet. I don't want to go to heaven; I want to stay where I be."

She insisted upon hearing about his wedding, and sighed in satisfaction.

"I knew 'twas coming out that way," said she, "but I can let folks alone. I never was one to pull my beans up to see if they'd sprouted."

She had carefully made her will in favor of Myrtie and Joey, that they might have a roof of their own over their heads. "They'll think more of 'em if they've got a little property," she reasoned, shrewdly.

Now, she sat up with difficulty, and twisted her scanty hair into a tight knob. Sliding out of bed, she fastened her wrapper, and drew on her stockings and shoes. Pushing a chair before her, she made her way as far as the hall. With the same ghost-like step, she stole to the front door, opened it, and crossed the road. The bars of the fence were too heavy for her to lift, but there was a gap between two posts where her shrunken frame could squeeze through.

Up, up, to the top of the hill. Her body felt light and cold, without substance. The grass smelled of dry everlasting where she trod upon it. On the highest slope a maple tree burned, like a torch set there. She saw the torch. It seemed to beckon to her. It looked bright-dark to her dazzled eyes, and the roaring of a triumphant gale was in her ears. She sank to the ground under the tree.

"I'm going to die, but I'll see one more sunset," she murmured to herself.

A red leaf fluttered down to the grass, and another,

and another. She stretched out a hand for them feebly.

"Pretty dears! You thought you'd come too, didn't you?" she said.

Over the long backs of the hills the yellow light streamed thickly, as if it were incandescent with particles of dust. The upper heavens had caught the strange radiance, but the ground was dark and cold. A mortal chill crept along the grass. Its finger touched her, and she did not stir again; only, her eyes were fixed upon the cloud-forms gathering in the west. Slowly their steel-blue masses took a sharper outline, and hung suspended in the golden ether. There was no warmth in them to cheer a passing soul. The sun went down. The river gave back the trees like a dark glass. And still the desire of the eyes held her, and she waited.

At last the sky flamed duskily with the purple softness of a moor, and a mantle of heather-colored haze dropped upon the hills. One rosy plume floated overhead. The glory grew, it brightened exceedingly —

Her eyes closed.

Below, in the road, it had grown dark when lights suddenly flashed to and fro. The front door of the cottage opened. Two men came out.

"I think she has gone up there," said the minister, pointing to the slope opposite.

"Impossible," said Dr. Kent. "She could not have walked twenty steps in her condition, and as for dragging herself up that bank it is against reason."

"Yes," said Dale. "Nevertheless, I think we shall find her up there."

He let down the bars, and the doctor followed with the lantern. Half-way up the hill he saw the minister's

silhouette above him, outlined against the sky. His head was bare, and he beckoned.

"Is she dead?" he asked.

"Quite dead," the doctor answered. He set the lantern on the ground, where it shed its bright circle around the three. "She must have been dead an hour, longer, I should say, if—" He dropped the stiff hand he held.

"It is inexplicable," he murmured to himself, "but so many things are inexplicable."

"Poor Myrtie, she was crying her heart out," he added, aloud.

Dale closed the cold hand over the red leaves it held.

"She had no son," he said, softly, and lifted the lifeless form in his arms.

Half an hour later, with the sound of Myrtie's sobs in his ears ("Oh, she was so good to me, she was so good to me!" the poor girl cried over and over), he stopped at the post-office to mail his letter to Shirley. The clerk saw him, and came to the window.

"There's a registered letter for you, Mr. Dale. We're glad to see you back," she added.

He thanked her with a smile which faded on the instant. The girl stole a glance at him while he signed the receipt. The minister looked very solemn to-night, she thought.

He took the long envelope she handed him with a premonition of discomfort, for he recognized the firm, peculiar handwriting. What had she to write to him about, he wondered. Turning his back to the group which had gathered at the window, he cut open the envelope. It held the title deeds to his mother's

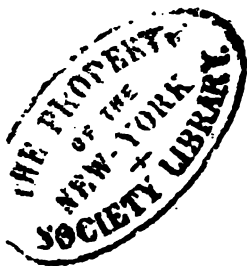
property, nothing more. Mrs. Dale had sent them to him in her own fashion, without a word.

Something in the unadorned act touched him in a vital spot. Thrusting the deeds into the breast of his coat, he went out into the night. Lights twinkled from the temporary buildings on the Green. He turned in the other direction, and made his way toward The Terrace. He must be alone where none could question him. The house loomed before him like a solid block of darkness. On the highest level the lawn was strewn with yellowing leaves. They blotted out the path, and clogged his feet. He mounted to the highest step of all, and sat down, hugging his knees, with his back against the door through which she had gone back so many times into her empty house — his brave little lady, too proud to ask for love — his wife! Ah, she was alive, she was alive! He pressed his lips to the knocker with a lover's passion; for he had held death in his arms; and the blood came back to his heart with a sting. How dark it was, how silent! He was here, and she was there. If he only had her here beside him, if he could but lay the deeds in her hand, and cry out all his insufficiency!

Mrs. Dale had made restitution; so he uncompromisingly termed it. It was not in him to understand all that lay behind the act. The possession of those securities had meant freedom to Linda Dale if she ever chose to take it. She had held them in reserve. If the burden she was dragging grew heavier, if her disgust with herself at the position she had drifted into became intolerable, she had the means at hand to break with it all. But she was a reckless giver. For a moment's friendship free from condemnation she had abandoned

herself to a generous impulse, and had tied her hands for the future, but Gordon would never understand. Yet he was profoundly moved. The woman of no heart, as he had called her, the cynic, whose mocking laugh still rang in his ears, had broken down at the first word of sympathy. He marveled at it. He felt as humble as a child, and tears stood in his eyes. It was a flash-light into a dark world that no man had ever fathomed, where one could be a stumbling-block to another without knowing it, where human beings must rise or fall together, so interwoven were their lives. He resented it no longer. Why he should have thought of Mr. Hitchcock at that moment, he could not have told, but he yearned over him. He longed to have him come back.

He had served his novitiate. He had fostered good, he had resisted evil, but he had not paid the full price for his power. Fresh from that lonely death on the hilltop, all things were clear to his vision. He had seen them with the eyes of the mind, but now he was learning them by heart. He knew now that, to discern the life of souls, neither wisdom, nor knowledge, nor even righteousness is enough — only love — only love.





4

5

6

7

8

